

## The Long Roots of Formalism in Brazil

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# The Long Roots of Formalism in Brazil

*By*

Luiz Renato Martins

*Edited by*

Juan Grigera

*Translated by*

Renato Rezende

*Introduced by*

Alex Potts



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*For Olivia and Aurora*





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# Acknowledgements (and Some Welcome Words to the Reader)

## A Kind of City

Instead of soil or a sample from nature, whence arguments, ideas, and expressions grow spontaneously or through their intrinsic virtues – as is often assumed – a book is rather similar to a city. Through such cities, not only do mental forms coexist and move about, but also the flesh-and-blood individuals who shape and drive them.

Among the responsibilities of the so-called authorial function is the political mandate of introducing predecessors and collaborators to the newly arrived reader. I start with the first. I do not want to transfer responsibilities or attribute judgements and polemics – which are my own initiative – but recognise the irrigating role of oral history, of the testimonies and reports that motivate and enliven all steps of the research. I am aware, of course, that the action of listening and the memory of a historian who collected such observations serve to modify them and imbue them with a specific aspect. But it will be ultimately up to the reader to raise the doubts and replies required for the critical game of reading.

I shall begin by mentioning some friends and their inspiring works: Amílcar de Castro, Antonio Dias, Arthur Piza, my all-time companion Carmela Gross, and Paulo Mendes da Rocha – whose architecture, prioritising the city, materialises – with lucidity, sobriety and lyrical simplicity – examples of how to conceive of equipment and buildings for common use. In the working dialogue between Carmela and Paulo, which is not infrequently associated in the same place (Brazilian Museum of Sculpture (MuBE), São Paulo, 2017; Social Service of Commerce-SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017), the principle of citizenship emerges as a basic and common right of the anonymous on an equal footing with the illustrious: concrete right to access and transit through the same places, of coexisting in the city, after all, as a common place and, in principle, universalised.

## The Perspective of the City

I do not evoke such a principle gratuitously or abstractly. Brasília is the main theme of the first two studies collected here and it reappears as a watershed

in some passages of the book's closing chapter (Chapter 13). From the point of view of architecture and urban planning, Brasília is an example of how the exercise of so-called creative talent in Brazil has historically served the reproduction of iniquities – in the face of which the architecture of Paulo Mendes da Rocha demonstrates its potential for critical negativity. In addition, the links between art and the city were emphasised by Argan throughout his work, which constitutes the theme of the tenth study of this book. Nevertheless, in addition to the chapter dedicated to Argan's work, the connection between art and the city serves as a statement of principle and introductory explanation to the fundamental perspective of the texts collected here. In fact, a prevalent point of view in the studies consists in taking as an anomaly the appropriation of art by individuals and criticising the self-confinement of art modes and forms, which consents in their banishment to non-universalised or private spaces. In short, considering art always from a common and collective perspective, as living work inherent to the city, is one of the modes of articulation of these studies.

### **The Angle of the Peripheries**

In this sense, another specification can be put forth. In addition to establishing the links of visual practices and forms with the development of the historical-social process and with class pressures and interests, the studies seek to specifically establish the angle of peripheral issues, within the contrasted and uneven but combined dynamic of the ceaseless confrontations between interests and modes of the peripheries and the centre.

In order to develop links and arteries that allow the reader to reflexively move from one chapter to another, I resorted to articulating materials and modes – including the notions of *formation*, *system* and *dismantling*, which are historically indicated and attributed in the footnotes and bibliography. I hope, like any researcher who also works as a teacher, that such ways are clearly visible and offer fluidity. But, in fact, it is up to the reader or passer-by, moving through the streets of this book, to have the last say.

### **Meetings and Debates**

The sole use of texts and working within the retreat of a library hardly help achieve more than an abstract scheme. For the lines and arrows on a piece of paper and primary hypotheses to take real shape, the heat of meetings,

conversations, and debates is essential. It is necessary to listen to and bring in the many voices and sounds that form the contradictory complexity of a city. There were too many occasions for that during the 15 years that separate the initial presentation of the first study, in April 2002, in an auditorium in São João da Boa Vista, in the inland of São Paulo state, from the current form of this book. As such, they are impossible to count or summarise. But I can say that I shared many of the most striking occasions with Chico de Oliveira, Paulo Arantes, Paulo Sérgio Duarte, Juan Antonio Ramírez – my unforgettable Madrid-based friend from Málaga – and with my life partner Carmela Gross. There were many others too – to be fair, the many I am unable to mention here.

In fact, how many talks and situations translate into a book? The threads of meetings and conversations gradually unfold and multiply, engendering new fabrics, arising over the course of the many activities and discussions with my students at the University of São Paulo (USP) and in Latin American universities in which I had the good fortune and pleasure to visit and work, in Mexico City, Buenos Aires and Santiago, and with the Colombians I met at USP. The unsettling experience of the peripheral condition – ‘within the rarefied dialectic between not being and being someone else’<sup>1</sup> – brings new angles with every testimony one hears.

I also shared the always thought-provoking re-discussion of the issues of late peripheral formation, with my friends from the DESFORMAS centre and, in the last two years, with my research companions of the Aesthetics of Turbulence work group: Carmela, Ana Paula Pacheco, Jorge Grespan and Marcos Soares – among the original members of the DESFORMAS centre; and Steve Edwards, Gail Day, Juan Grigera and Peter Thomas, among my friends from HM (Historical Materialism), who have joined the discussion in recent years in a variety of ways, at HM meetings and the encounters arising from them. I owe a lot of my understanding of certain specific signs of dismantling in the context of global economy and work relations to some friends – Ricardo Antunes, Plínio de Arruda Sampaio Jr. and Jorge Souto Maior – companions of struggles against the arbitrariness and infamies perpetrated by the privatist and anti-democratic rage of the rectorates, first of all, of the USP, but also of the two other public universities of São Paulo. However, among all interlocutors and comrades-in-arms, I would like to highlight the lesson in struggle, resistance, and collective work that I get shoulder to shoulder with companions from the USP Workers’ Union (SINTUSP). From such lessons I see the embryo of a new university – not like the one we know today, a reproducer of iniquities

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1 See Chapter 7, note 27, in this volume.

and segregation, but one that is genuinely at the service of the great majorities that are, now, as before, excluded and relegated in Brazil, not only from higher education, but from the sense and benefit of most of the research developed by those of us who, in one way or another, find ourselves active within the current system.

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At BN (National Library) of the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, I owe much to the attention and democratic disposition of Fábio Lima, associated with his commitment to the publication of Brazilian works abroad. This book would not exist without the funds from the programme.

Other institutions, among which the support from the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) stands out, subsidised the previous versions of the studies collected here. These many forms of support are indicated, one by one, in the 'Credits' section immediately following.

I would also like to pay homage to other companions. The daily constant rhythm of their tasks combines with mine, forming the working site, indispensable for the book project to materialise amidst a lively, dense, and collective atmosphere, in which the works of many combine and interact: Renato Rezende, my translator (assisted by Martin Heuser) whose participation was decisive for the project to overcome all difficulties and meet very tight deadlines, due to mishaps prior to his collaboration; Gustavo Motta, a companion in many parts of this research for years, and a collaborator and friend who wrote, with unique zeal, the bibliography, searching for translations into English of the Brazilian texts cited, in addition to also finding and establishing links to the visual works cited. Corner-by-corner, along the book's argumentative pathways, readers will have in their hands information collected as if in a city guide

and will be able to evaluate by themselves how important and decisive the contribution of Gustavo Motta's research was, to give specific density to the argumentation, or even to concretely enable its refutation. However, Gustavo Motta's collaboration, in addition to being specific, has reached a higher level. Thus, on crucial occasions, seeing a certain disorder in the relation between chapters and predicting some confusion for readers, he suggested organising the book in three sections containing groups of texts, as indicated in the table of contents. Natalie Roth, my day-to-day assistant and collaborator, besides taking care of the paper files of the book project and collecting varied data on the internet, protected me from the inhospitable and mortifying light of computers. In fact, she spared my eyes as much as possible, allowing this sexagenarian researcher – an animal from a different era and, to make things worse, with retinal sequelae – to remain as long as possible in the pleasant ecosystem of a sea of paper, pens and pencils.

The fraternal interventions of friends from Paris were very often decisive as well, enabling presentations and occasions for debates, or welcoming, reading and supporting with suggestions, in varied ways and at many moments, the work in progress over 15 years that included many work stays in France: François Albera – *mon cher camarade préfacier* and *éditeur* – and Régis Michel – *mon frère*, in many ways. I also wish to thank *mes très chers amis* Catherine Monbeig Goguel, France Vernier, Geneviève Morel, Jean-Philippe Chimot, Marie-Catherine Sahut, Paul Levayer and Serge Bianchi. *Salut et fraternité!*

# Credits

## 1 Strategies of Occupying Space in Brazil, from Tarsila to Oiticica

### *Presentations*

'Tarsila e Brasília ou Maracangalha; Oiticica e Mangueira/ Em torno de algumas estratégias de ocupação do espaço no Brasil', in *III Semana Pagu de Literatura e Arte*, Fundação de Ensino Octávio Bastos, São João da Boa Vista-SP, 18.04.2002;

'Tarsila e Brasília; Oiticica e Mangueira/ Estratégias de ocupação do espaço no Brasil', in ciclo *Pintura e Espaço/ A Reconstrução da Espacialidade na Pintura depois da Revolução Cubista*, 24.06–19.08.2003, coordinated by Paulo Sérgio Duarte, carried out in parallel with the paintings exhibition: *Carlos Vergara, Viajante, obras de 1965 a 2003*, Santander Cultural, Porto Alegre, 29.07.2003;

'Tarsila e Brasília; Oiticica e Mangueira/ Estratégias de ocupação do espaço no Brasil', in *Ciclo de Cultura de Greve/ Greve é Formação*, 22.09–11.11.2003, Departamento de Artes Plásticas, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo (ECA-USP), Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, 14.10.2003;

'De Tarsila jusqu'à Oiticica: stratégies d'occupation de l'espace au Brésil', in seminar of Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Studies on History of Brazil, directed by Prof. Dr. Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, Chair of History of Brazil, Centre Roland Mousnier/ Centre d'Études du Brésil et de l'Atlantique Sud, Université de Paris IV – Sorbonne, Paris, 09.03.2004;

'De Tarsila a Oiticica: estrategias de ocupación del espacio en Brasil', in seminar *Momentos de Visualidad Brasileña Moderna*, 04–06.10.2004, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), Unidad Azcapotzalco, Ciudad de México, 04.10.2004;

'De Tarsila a Oiticica: estratégias de ocupação do espaço no Brasil', in *Em Torno da Formação e do Desmanche de um Sistema Visual Brasileiro Moderno*, 28–29.09.2007, Programa em Cultura Brasileira/ Artes Plásticas, coord. Florença Garramuño, Universidad de San Andrés/ Fundación Centro de Estudos Brasileiros (FunCEB) – Embaixada do Brasil, Buenos Aires, 28.09.2007;

'De Tarsila a Oiticica: estrategia de ocupación del espacio en Brasil', in *Formación y Desmantelamiento de un Sistema Visual Brasileño Moderno*, 02–

05.12.2008, Coordinación de Licenciatura en Diseño, Universidade Autónoma Metropolitana-UAM, Unidad Cuajimalpa, Ciudad de México, 02.12.2008;

'De Tarsila a Oiticica: estrategia de ocupación del espacio en Brasil', in *Formación y Desmantelamiento de un Sistema Visual Moderno en Brasil*, 08–10.12.2008, División de Estudios de Posgrado – Coordinación del Posgrado en Historia del Arte, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-UNAM, Ciudad de México, 08.12.2008.

### *Publication*

'De Tarsila a Oiticica: estratégias de ocupação do espaço no Brasil', in revista *Margem Esquerda/ Estudos Marxistas*, nº 2, São Paulo, Boitempo, novembro 2003, pp. 151–62.

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## 2 'Free Form': Brazilian Mode of Abstraction or a Malaise in History

### *Presentations*

'Pampulha e Brasília ou as longas raízes do formalismo no Brasil', in *Inventar y Vivir – Oscar Niemeyer en Pampulha*, Fundação Centro de Estudos Brasileiros – FunCEB/ Embajada del Brasil, Buenos Aires, 14.10.2009;

'Pampulha e Brasília ou as longas raízes do formalismo no Brasil', in *Precarização, Apartheid e Desmanche*, 03.09–19.11.2010, Centro de Estudos Desmanche e Formação de Sistemas Simbólicos, DESFORMAS/ CENEDIC/ CEMARX, FFLCH-USP, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, 01.10.2010;

'Forma-libre: modo brasileiro de abstracción o el malestar en la historia', in *xxxv Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte: Continuo/ Discontinuo – Los Dilemas de la Historia del Arte en América Latina*, 02–06.10.2011, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-UNAM, Oaxaca de Juárez, 04.10.2011;

'Brasília and living-forms or the deep roots of formalism in Brazil', in seminar *Methods and Philosophy of Art History & Visual Culture*, 09–11.10.2011, org. Dr. David Craven, Department of Art & Art History, The Latin American & Iberian Institute, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 11.10.2011;

'Brasília ou l'anarchie du pouvoir', in *Les conférences de la ligne générale/ L'histoire de l'art: un langage du pouvoir?*, coordinated by Régis Michel, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA), Auditorium de la Galerie Colbert, Paris, 23.11.2013.

### *Publication*

'Pampulha e Brasília ou as Longas Raízes do Formalismo no Brasil', in revista *Crítica Marxista/ Estudos Marxistas*, nº 33, São Paulo, Editora da UNESP, 2011, pp. 105–14.

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## 3 All This Geometry, Where Does It Come From, Where Does It Go?

### *Presentations*

‘De onde vem e para onde vai tanta geometria?/ Sobre Vibração Ondular, de Luiz Sacilotto’, in *História da Arte Brasileira no Acervo da Pinacoteca – Singularidades da abstração geométrica no Brasil*, coord. Taisa Helena Pascale Palhares, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, 18.09.2004;

‘De dónde viene y para dónde va ... tanta geometria/ Sobre el arte concreto y neo-concreto, Brasil 1950–64’, in *Momentos de Visualidad Brasileña Moderna*, Departamento de Procesos y Técnicas de Realización, División de Ciencias y Artes para el Diseño, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-UAM, Unidad Azcapotzalco, Ciudad de México, 05.10.2004;

‘De onde vem e para onde vai ... tanta geometria?’, in *Formação e Desmanche de um Sistema Visual Brasileiro Moderno?*, 27.08–05.11.2007, coord. L.R. Martins, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Visuais da Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo (PPGAV-ECA-USP), Centro de Estudos dos Direitos da Cidadania (CENEDIC), Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo (FFLCH-USP), Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2nd module: *Formação e Desmanche de um Sistema Visual Brasileiro Moderno: Realização, Incompletude, Dissolução?*, panel ‘Geometria, Utopia, Planejamento e Modernização’, auditório Paulo Emílio, Escola de Comunicações

e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo (ECA-USP), Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, 10.09.2007;

‘¿De donde viene y hacia donde va tanta geometria?’, in *Em Torno da Formação e do Desmanche de um Sistema Visual Brasileiro Moderno*, 28–29.09.2007, Programa en Cultura Brasileira/ Artes Plásticas, coord. Florencia Garramuño, Universidad de San Andrés/ Fundación Centro de Estudos Brasileiros (FunCEB) – Embaixada do Brasil, Buenos Aires, 28.09.2007;

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‘¿De donde viene y hacia donde va tanta geometria?’ (partes I y II), in *Formación y Desmantelamiento de un Sistema Visual Moderno en Brasil*, Coordinación de Licenciatura en Diseño, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), Unidad Cuajimalpa, Ciudad de México, DF, 04–05.12.2008;

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#### 4 Trees of Brazil

##### *Presentations*

‘O legado neoconcreto e os programas de transição da arte nos anos 60’, in *Formação e Desmanche de um Sistema Visual Brasileiro Moderno?*, 27.08–05.11.2007, coord. L.R. Martins, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Visuais da Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo (PPGAV-ECA-USP), Centro de Estudos dos Direitos da Cidadania (CENEDIC), Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo (FFLCH-USP), Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2nd module: *Formação e Desmanche de um Sistema Visual Brasileiro Moderno: Realização, Incompletude, Dissolução?*, panel ‘Geometria, Utopia, Planejamento e Modernização’, auditório Paulo Emílio, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo (ECA-USP), Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, 11.09.2007;

‘Do Neoconcretismo aos programas de transição da arte no pós-1964/ O esquema da consolidação’, in *Em Torno da Formação e do Desmanche de um Sistema Visual Brasileiro Moderno*, 28–29.09.2007, Programa em Cultura Brasileira/ Artes Plásticas, coord. Florencia Garramuño, Universidad de San Andrés/ Fundación Centro de Estudos Brasileiros (FunCEB) – Embaixada do Brasil, Buenos Aires, 28.09.2007;

‘Del Neoconcretismo a los Programas de Transición’, in División de Estudios de Posgrado – Coord. del Posgrado en Historia del Arte, Facultad de Filosofía y Artes, Universidad Nacional Autónoma del México (UNAM), Ciudad de México, DF, 10.12.2008;

‘Do Neoconcretismo aos programas de transição da arte no pós-1964/ O esquema da consolidação (1964–75)’, in Seminário *Tempos de Greve/ Dias de Expressão e Criação*, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo (ECA-USP), Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, 16.07.2009.

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## 5 The Situation of Art and the ‘Pensée Unique’

### *Presentations*

‘A situação da arte e o “pensamento único”’, in panel ‘Arte e Contemporaneidade’, seminar *Delineando Nortes*, Divisão de Pesquisas, Centro Cultural São Paulo, São Paulo, 24.09.2001;

‘A situação da arte e o pensamento único’, in panel ‘Anos 80 – Revisão e Híbridismo’, *Ciclo de debates Mapa do Agora*, coord. Agnaldo Farias, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, 20.09.2002;

‘A situação da arte e o pensamento único’, in *Filhos da Puta: O Golpe nas Artes – Sobre a Interferência do Regime Militar nas Artes; do Golpe aos Dias Atuais*, org. Centro Acadêmico Lupe Cotrim, Escola de Comunicações e Artes – Universidade de São Paulo, Auditório Freitas Nobre, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, 15.04.2004;

'La situación del arte y el pensamiento único: el arte de 1980 a hoy en día', in *Momentos de Visualidad Brasileña Moderna*, 04–06.10.2004, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), Unidad Azcapotzalco, Ciudad de México, DF, 06.10.2004.

### *Publication*

'A Situação da Arte e o "Pensamento Único"', in revista *Margem Esquerda/Estudos Marxistas*, nº 5, São Paulo, Boitempo, maio de 2005, pp. 89–102.

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## **6 Formation and Dismantling of a Brazilian Visual System**

### *Presentations*

'Formación y descomposición de un sistema visual brasileño', in *Comunicación, Diseño y Tecnologías de la Información*, org. Gustavo Rojas Bravo, Div. Ciencias de la Comunicación y Diseño, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), Unidad Cuajimalpa, Casa Abierta al Tiempo, Ciudad de México, DF, 04.10.2006;

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Alexandre Benoit

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Marcela Fleury

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# Introduction

Alex Potts

This volume of translations of Luiz Martins' writings on modern Brazilian art and architecture follows on from an earlier study *The Conspiracy of Modern Art* that came out in 2017. The volumes are in a way complementary in that the incisive critique Martins offers in his first book on modern art as it evolved in Europe and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is taken up and further developed in the current volume. The perspective has shifted though. His project this time is to analyse the particular vicissitudes of artistic and architectural modernism as it took shape in Brazil in the mid-twentieth century, and then became gutted by an apolitical formalist aestheticism in the postmodern age of neoliberal capitalism. Overall, his anatomising of the different trajectories taken by modern art in the dominant core cultures and in the conditions of relative underdevelopment in Brazil makes for a fascinating diagnosis. In the current volume, in addition to offering a historically and politically much more compelling analysis than has been available so far in English of the fascinating, largely misunderstood preoccupation with and repurposing of modern art and architecture's abstracting and formal imperatives in Brazil, Martins also gives the European and North American reader a basis for reflecting back in new ways on the politics of artistic engagements with modernity in the West.

Martins' career and activities as an art historian, critic and cultural analyst are detailed in Steve Edwards' introduction to the earlier volume. Suffice it to mention here that Martins' background as a TV and newspaper journalist and film-maker, before he embarked upon his university career as an historian and theorist of modern art – he now teaches at the University of São Paulo – means that he writes more as an independent intellectual with a deeply grounded sense of political purpose than he does as a straightforward academic. Edwards' introduction also tracks the trajectory of Martins' political affiliations, which included a period working for the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT or Workers' Party), which he eventually left as it became compromised by affiliations with big business, sometime before it took office as the party of government under Lula da Silva in 2003. Martins has since become one of its more outspoken critics from the left.

Even English-speaking readers with no particular knowledge of the artistic and political culture of modern Brazil will find a lot of immediate interest to them in Martins' provocative and thoughtful essays. For a start he prompts

one to radically rethink accepted ideas on those aspects of twentieth-century Brazilian art and architecture that have achieved international prominence, most notably the modern Brazilian architecture that flourished in the period after the Second World War associated with names such as Oscar Niemeyer and Lúcio Costa. This culminated in the planning and the building of the new capital city of Brasília in barren rural countryside, a project started in 1956 and partly completed and officially inaugurated in 1960. For good or for ill, Brasília has acquired a status as a paradigmatic instance of totally planned monumental modernist urbanism. While this is generally understood as an extravagant exercise in post-Corbusier architectural modernism, Martins alerts us to its specifically Brazilian formation, showing how it was constituted by grafting the display of technocratic rationality implicit in its clean modern styling onto the basic format and social character of a traditional building type – the non-urban latifundia mansion of the slave plantation, whose political and cultural configurations have persisted in the incompletely industrialising economy of postwar Brazil. The architecture that emerged, Martins argues, was not so much hyper-modern as the hybrid product of a confluence of archaic and modernising impulses. That this architecture spoke to both Anglo-American and European architectural theorists as ultra-modernist suggests that the modernism of the core cultures itself harboured reactionary elements at odds with the democratic and progressive ideals apparently embodied in its purified abstract forms.

Another aspect of modern Brazilian artistic culture that has found a place in canonical accounts of modern art is the abstract work that came out of the Brazilian Concrete and Neo-concrete movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Artists such as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica are now seen as key figures in a broader shift that took place internationally away from purist geometric abstraction to an alternative, more informal mode, and also to more participatory interventionist practices – while still operating within the parameters of a modernist refusal or negation of conventional representation and figuration. Lygia Clark, rather against the grain of her radically democratic commitments, has been taken up as the darling of a humanist neo-formalist tendency in the contemporary art world, while Oiticica, with his more hybrid and often provocative work, has been championed as a harbinger of the postmodern move away from the modernist cult of the autonomous art object. The value of Martins' richly grounded analysis of the role played by these artists, particularly Oiticica, within the development of a modern art scene in postwar Brazil goes beyond just adding a local inflection to our understanding of the aesthetic and ideological constitution of their work. It changes our understanding of the very nature of the broader artistic projects of which they were a part, and in the

process invites us to rethink what was at stake more generally in the artistic radicalism that manifested itself internationally in the 1960s.

Martins starts from the assumption that one can only properly understand such changes in artistic form if one sees them as bound up with the changing formations of late capitalism and the underlying class division that it was both negotiating and trying to suppress. The move away from purist geometric abstraction in Brazil in the period leading up to the military coup of 1964 and during the interregnum prior to the hardline crackdown in 1968, a time when the cultural scene was still largely spared by the regime's anti-union and anti-democratic policies, Martins explains, should be seen as growing out of an acute awareness of the failure of technocratic modernism to address, let alone in any way significantly change, the underlying social and economic problems and class politics of Brazil's underdevelopment. It was a society in which a thin overlay of urban industrialisation was accommodating itself to an economy still based on the production of semi-processed raw materials – such as coffee, rubber and gold – and still shaped by the class structures of a plantation economy that, long after national independence had been achieved, retained a colonial system of slave labour. Pure form then began to seem like an empty utopian construct, exposed after the military coup as having little grounding in genuinely democratic or progressive aspirations and as having no real purchase on the class realities of Brazilian society, beyond acting as a façade for a dictatorship promoting the interests of big business. Questions of form in these circumstances were also pressing political questions for artists committed to engaging with the social fabric of life in Brazil, outside the citadels of the capitalist elite. It is important to be clear that this was a dialectical process, as Martins' analysis reminds us, one that negated established forms of classic modernism, while still at some level engaging with the democratic social and political ideals it had once purported to represent. This shift, Martins argues, was radically different from the later postmodern, neoliberal abandonment of the political and artistic commitments of earlier modern art. An important point, given how artists such as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica are being represented as pioneers of a shift to postmodern relaxation and multicultural hybridising of the rigours of modernism, even while the pure forms of modernist abstraction have been repurposed and enjoy an afterlife as autonomous artistic exercises, freed from their earlier political baggage.

## Intellectual Formations

While Martins' approach is clearly based on a reading of the classics of Marxist aesthetic theory – Benjamin, Adorno and Lukács – it has more particular roots in the Marxist sociology of literature developed in the postwar period as an alternative to the reductivism of much Marxist writing at the time about the class-based nature of art and literature. This sociology of literature sought to move beyond simple determinist explanations in which a work of art was seen as straightforwardly reflecting the class politics of its social milieu. It was a mode of analysis that sought to integrate a close examination of the particularities of artistic form and integrate this with a diagnosis of the larger structure of class relations shaping the world in which the artist lived. Artistic forms were not simply to be interpreted as the direct expression of social forms. Rather it was imperative to examine them closely for what they might reveal about social class beyond what was known from other sources. The literary theorist working in this mode to whom Martins is most directly indebted is the Brazilian Roberto Schwarz, several of whose writings from the 1960s and 1970s are now available in English translations.<sup>1</sup> English-speaking readers will be more familiar with work in a similar vein by contemporaries or near contemporaries of Schwarz writing in Western Europe and the US, such as Lucien Goldmann<sup>2</sup> and Fredric Jameson,<sup>3</sup> as well as, slightly later, Franco Moretti.<sup>4</sup> This tradition of thought that developed in the field of literary studies clearly owes a lot to Adorno's aesthetic theory, but it is also deeply indebted to Lukács, both in his early pre-Marxist<sup>5</sup> and his later, more nuanced Marxist writing on literature and the history of literature.<sup>6</sup> While nowadays there are many who dismiss Lukács's writings, particularly those on modernism, as vulgarly reductive, it is important to note that even these often derive from a very illuminating analysis of the class political resonances of artistic form, as in Lukács's diagnostic analysis of Kafka's modernism in *Against Misunderstood Realism* (1958).<sup>7</sup>

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1 See Schwarz 1992 and 2012. For a particularly illuminating exposition of his approach, see the essay 'Objective Form: Reflections on the Dialectic of Roguery', published in Schwarz 2012, ch. 2.

2 Goldmann 1975, first published in French in 1963.

3 Jameson 1971.

4 Moretti 1983.

5 Lukács 1978, first published in 1916.

6 Lukács 1962a, first published in Russian in 1937.

7 This is best known under the title given to its English translation *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, see Lukács 1962b.



This Marxist sociology of literary and artistic form did play a part (albeit a more modest one) in art-historical writing. An important instance is the work of the Italian Communist Giulio Carlo Argan, whose take-up in Brazil is the subject of Chapter 10 in the present volume.<sup>8</sup> While enjoying a considerable reputation in Italy and the Latin world generally, Argan is little known in the US and UK, and very few of his writings have been translated into English. More widely recognised internationally is the work of the Italian Marxist theorist and historian, Manfredo Tafuri – a particularly astute analyst of the politics of architectural form – who, like Argan, complemented critical commentary on the modern with extensive historical studies on work of the early modern and Enlightenment periods. In the English-speaking world, the best known proponent of such an approach to analysing visual art is the art historian, art critic and one time Situationist T.J. Clark, who made his name in the early 1970s with two highly influential studies on nineteenth-century French art. These were characterised by a skilful integration of meticulous formal analysis of works of art with finely tuned and densely researched explorations of the class politics of the milieu in which an artist was working.<sup>9</sup> Clark's scholarship, often seen as initiating a new social history of art, had a formative impact on Martins' studies on the modern art of the French nineteenth century published in his earlier volume *The Conspiracy of Modern Art*. Another important figure who offered some particularly telling analysis of the class political resonances of both art critical as well as artistic formations is the literary scholar John Barrell – his *The Dark Side of the Landscape* (1980) remains something of a classic, bringing to bear an analysis of social class on understandings of an artistic form that at the time was generally thought to be free of ideological connotations, namely English landscape painting.<sup>10</sup>

The vogue this mode of Marxist analysis enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s has largely subsided nowadays. Many more theoretically minded art historians and literary theorists have turned from a Marxist sociology of form to French structuralist and poststructuralist models. This is even true to a degree of some of its more noted earlier practitioners such as T.J. Clark and Fredric Jameson, even as they hold on to the basic idea that artistic form is not autonomous but, inasmuch as it really counts, is bound up with larger formations shaping political and social life, and derives what ethical substance it has from this. The issue is not that the basic insights of this approach have been superseded –

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8 Martins offers a fuller discussion of Argan's art-historical approach in the essay 'Argan Seminar: Art, Value and Work' in his earlier volume, *The Conspiracy of Modern Art*.

9 Clark 1973a and 1973b. On Clark, see Day 2010.

10 Barrell 1980; see also Barrell 1986.

many live on as passive common sense. Anti-capitalist critique is still very much the fashion in intellectual circles, particularly in writing on modern art. However, a lot of the earlier purchase on class politics has been lost because of an unwillingness to commit to a fully engaged analysis of larger social formations and their historical evolution. The latter is seen as bad totalising, which it often has been. But the loss of the ambition to gain a grip on underlying social formations – whether Marxist in character or not – means that the method has become unbalanced, with virtuoso parsings and deconstructions of artistic form on the one hand, and vague talk about capitalist hegemony, or narrowly focused references to relevant nuggets of social history on the other.

Martins is a decided exception to this tendency, and one of the great values of his writing is his willingness to buck the trend and commit to an ambitious mapping of social formations as a basis for his equally ambitious thinking about the larger significance of artistic form. Martins continues to operate in terms of the overtly Marxist theorising of artistic and social formations that flourished before the onset of the postmodern turn. He also preserves from this earlier tradition the conviction that artistic culture, however deeply imbricated it is in a capitalist commodity economy, however much determined in its very substance by the realities of a neoliberal world order, should, at its best, not just strive to resist the dominant, thoroughly capitalistic values of the art world; it should also lay claim to retaining within its horizons the possibility of some other liberated, truly democratic and communistic, if largely unimaginable, order. For Martins, such a sense of possibility cannot be materialised through art in utopian visions of an alternative world, which would inevitably be aridly and emptily abstract, and possibly even complicit in the system they were supposedly rejecting, nor even, as was once possible in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, in radical practices modelling an emancipated living labour that could stand as an alternative to the dead labour of modern capitalism. But it is not something he gives up on, however much he insists that art nowadays is in a state where attempts to project such possibilities only seem able to travesty them. His is not a resigned, melancholic anti-capitalism, but an uncompromisingly feisty one, as is evident in his concluding comments to the chapter 'From the Debate About Formation to Strike as Formation' on the impossibility of now reactivating the politically activist artistic culture that had flourished in Brazil in the 1960s: 'Nothing else is left to the majority except to struggle. Such is the beginning of a new era. The [present] time of *dismantling* is the clear and unstoppable time of class struggle without respite, and of the self-organisation of the working classes, without conciliatory illusions'.

### Brazil and the Project of a Modern Art

Several issues stand out in Martins' diagnosis of the vicissitudes of modern art as a radical project in a Brazilian context. It is worth singling these out, both to draw attention to the distinctive characteristics of Martins' analysis and to reflect on the ways in which they might suggest a rethinking of our current understandings of the class politics at work in artistic modernism. Martins' approach has the great virtue of avoiding the twin pitfalls of either simply appropriating the particularities of modern Brazilian art to the workings of a larger international art scene, or representing it as an exotic, localised other to the mainstream modern art. A key factor in this respect is Martins' commitment to the model of uneven and combined development that does justice not just to the coexistence of archaic and modern currents in Brazilian artist culture and class formations, but also to the formations that arise from their interpenetration and mutual interaction. He is not conjuring up some vision of picturesque hybridity. Rather he is showing how the persistence of archaic local formations, going back to Brazil's origins as a colonial plantation slave economy, collude with newer modernising ones to maintain the dominance of a moneyed elite, as well as the huge social inequalities endemic to the conditions of underdevelopment in the Brazilian economy. These persistent social inequalities, Martins explains, were integral to the operations of a long-standing, large-scale system of commodity production based primarily in agriculture and the extraction of raw materials, supplemented by a financial and industrial sector that remained subordinate even after the postwar phase of aggressive modernisation that promoted the patronage of new high modernist building complexes.

Particularly suggestive in this respect is the interpretation Martins offers of the conception and layout of the central government buildings in Brasília (Chapter 2), each relatively isolated, spaced out from one another, and dominating the open area around them, and in the case of one of the more flamboyant structures, the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, faced by a broad monumental colonnade. The overall effect, he points out, is to give 'the whole the imposing air of a rural seat, typical of a large landholding'. What one sees then is a particularly telling instance of 'Corbusier's functionalist architecture' being 'functionalised as allegory. As such it was a result of a consortium between the artist avant-garde and agrarian-commercial capital, linked to the coffee latifundia'.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Complementing the discussion of uneven and combined development in relation to

Underpinning Martins' analysis of the emergence and subsequent historical development of a modern Brazilian art and architecture is his conception of 'Formation and Dismantling of a Brazilian Visual System', developed in Chapter 6. What concerns him with regard to formation is the emergence of a sustained critical artistic culture, consolidated in the 1940s and 1950s,<sup>12</sup> and then radicalised in the 1960s. Rounding out this history of formation is the ensuing history of what he sees as its progressive dismantling – firstly as a result of the dictatorship's suppression of radical democratising cultural initiatives with the passage of its Institutional Act No. 5 in 1968, and eventually later with the takeover of the Brazilian art world by a neoliberal (and post-modern) cultural economy. This he sees as starting in the later, less repressive years of the dictatorship and continuing into the period of supposed re-democratisation after 1985. Formation is not meant in a conventional sense as designating the creation of a relatively autonomous artistic tradition characterised by a single identifiable style. Rather it has to do with the development of a sustained, critically self-aware artistic culture that was not so much an arena of consensus and harmonious collectivity as one of a contestation of values. Martins details how this contestation became particularly marked in the period between 1964 and 1968 (see Chapter 4, 'Trees of Brazil') when tendencies such as Neo-Concrete art, New Figuration (a politically radicalised form of Pop) and the New Objectivity challenged the privileging of a formalist abstraction, previously valued – at least in theory – for its progressive and modernising potential, but now seen as complicit in the technocratic modernism and depoliticisation promoted by what had become after the coup of 1964 an overtly authoritarian military dictatorship. Abstract form in visual art and architecture now seemed little more than the empty rational patterning of a façade disguising the rapacious operations of a ruthless capitalist economy and the increasingly brutal political regime serving its interests.

The particular context in Brazil led to an activist contestation of modernist formalism that was more intensely political and more grounded in an engagement with the social realities of class inequality than its equivalents in the European and American cultural core at the time. Oiticica, for example, for a time shifted the site of his practice to a favela in Rio, not just gathering materials

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modernist architecture in Chapter 3 is the discussion focused specifically on geometric abstraction in visual art in Chapter 4.

12 Martins' account of the earlier history of such a formation as it first emerged in Brazilian literary culture partly derives from Roberto Schwarz's studies of the subject (see, for example, the essays 'Brazilian Culture' and 'The Cart, the Horse and the Modernist Poet', in Schwarz 1992).

and performing there, but engaging in work that involved the active participation of favela dwellers whom he on one occasion unsuccessfully sought to introduce into the elite arena of a modern art gallery. In a present-day context, such an intervention would be much less radical than it was at the time – partly because of the permissiveness of the neoliberal contemporary art scene, which Martins repeatedly deplores, and partly because such gestures have themselves become incorporated as officially validated avant-gardist strategies.

Martins' analysis of the dismantling of Brazil's radicalised artistic culture in the 1960s – which was also a dismantling of a longer term formation around the idea of modern art in Brazil – is partly fuelled by his regrets for the passing of a particularly creative artistic radicalism with which he strongly identifies, one of whose proponents, Antonio Dias, is still alive and producing work Martins esteems for its continuing political purchase (Chapter 9, 'Art Against the Grain', is devoted to the artist). Dias began in the mid-1960s working in a figurative, politically charged Pop mode – called New Figuration in Brazil and Figuration Narrative in France, a movement with which Dias was briefly associated. Then in the late 1960s he shifted to a more conceptual, still politicised way of working, one that drew on language and linguistic devices and deployed a consistently abstract visual vocabulary that eschewed the imagistic and representational qualities of Pop (a little like contemporary work by Italian Arte Povera artist Alighiero Boetti). The larger historical logic of the dismantling Martins decries is not seen by him as being particularly distinctive to a Brazilian context, even though he makes the point that it was accelerated by the cultural policies of the Brazilian dictatorship. Rather he envisages it as being part of the larger structural shift within the late capitalist economy in the later twentieth century towards neoliberalism, which in its earlier stages coincided with an outright attack by the political right on the postwar welfare state, trade unions, and the anti-capitalist and radically democratic political and artistic culture of the 1960s. Significantly, Martins characterises this shift with reference to Thatcherism and Reaganism, rather than to local political developments in Brazil. The larger changes he sees as taking place in the dismantling of a critical artistic culture in Brazil are defined by him primarily by way of a broader diagnosis of neoliberal postmodernism seen as an international phenomenon, into which he sees the Brazilian art world being increasingly incorporated, with disastrous consequences. Writers such as David Harvey and Fredric Jameson<sup>13</sup> have analysed this shift to the postmodern which is rather more fully articulated than Martins' account, albeit lacking in the energetic punch of his disgust with what

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13 Harvey 1989; Jameson 1984.

he sees as the utterly debased, commodified, consumerist and emptily aestheticised condition of the artistic culture that has emerged out of the neoliberal world order (Chapter 5, “The Situation of Art and the “Pensée Unique”).

Characteristic of Martins is his comment on how in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, even in countries such as Brazil, which for part of the time suffered under a regime of repressive dictatorship, the winds of possible change ‘were relatively freely flowing when compared to the mirrored or glazed walls that now shape exchanges for primarily narcissistic purposes in today’s intersubjective practices’, and which reign supreme in the art world. This nicely resonates with a recent work by Hans Haacke responding to the Koch brothers’ 65 million dollar sponsorship of a new plaza with fountains outside the entrance to the Metropolitan Museum. In this work, Haacke features a text quoted from a sponsorship brochure put out by the museum announcing: ‘The business behind art knows the art of good business. Your company and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.’<sup>14</sup>

A striking feature of Martins’ essays is their persistent critique of a cult or fetishising of pure form, which he sees as particularly pervasive in a Brazilian context – a situation having to do with the central role abstraction played in the mid-twentieth century as the symbolic embodiment of a programme of modernisation projected by a Brazilian society and economy still very much operating in conditions of underdevelopment. That this cult of form takes on a different character in the later postmodern moment is in places noted by Martins, as in his account of how early Brazilian abstraction – Concrete art – has been revived and repurposed as an exemplary autonomous art, suited to the demands of a now utterly commodified art world (see Chapter 6). Such a phenomenon might be described as a kind of neo-formalism, except that, in a Brazilian context, this would create confusion around the naming of the Neo-Concrete movement (associated with Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica) that emerged in the years around the 1960s in reaction against the purist formalism of mainstream Brazilian abstraction. It is sometimes unclear whether Martins, when he engages in his critique of the Brazilian cult of form, is referring specifically to its later postmodern manifestation and the particular role played by purist formalism in the contemporary Brazilian art world, or whether he has in mind a longer tradition of Brazilian modern art going back to the mid-twentieth century. This confusion, which risks flattening the dialectical complexity of his very fine historical analysis of the role played by radical abstraction in the early years of a modern art project in Brazil, is particularly

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14 The work dating from 2014 is titled ‘The Business Behind Art’.

marked in the more polemical essays, such as his ironically titled final chapter on the 'International Benefit Society of Friends of Forms and Bulletin on the Brazilian Division' (Chapter 13). This includes an illuminating discussion of how the late take-up of Greenberg's formalism in the 1990s coincided with the Brazilian art world's promotion of a market-friendly, depoliticised conception of the work of art as an autonomous exercise in pure form. At the same time, this discussion merges into a more general critique of the cult of form, which makes it seem that Greenbergian optical formalism inevitably embodied such a transparently market-oriented ideology, regardless of the context in which it was being deployed, and regardless of the political impulses that might have motivated its deployment. In the context of the UK in the 1960s, for example, Greenberg's rigorously formal analysis could seem a refreshing alternative to the muddy humanism and bankrupt official modernism of a rather insular British art world.

There is sometimes a danger that Martins' forthright critique of the ideological resonances of formalism and of the general preoccupation with pure form in modern art can become somewhat reified and border on a Romantic rejection of form as somehow inherently reactionary in character and antithetical to any lived radical purpose. Martins does not in fact hold fast to such a view, as is made clear in, amongst other things, his genuinely dialectical analysis of the modernist architecture of Niemeyer and Costa and of Oiticica's and Dias's abstract art – even if his general polemic against a modernist privileging of form might at times imply otherwise. It is important to bear in mind that the real purchase of Martins' critique resides partly in its historical and cultural specificity, as well as in its attentiveness to particularities of the politics of class. In this volume, he is offering an unusually illuminating and passionately committed analysis of the vicissitudes of formalism in a Brazilian context of 'modernisation in conditions of persistent underdevelopment'. In the process, he makes us acutely aware of the complexities of the political significance this artistic tendency took on, in both the moment of formation and the moment of dismantling of a Brazilian modern art. At the same time, Martins achieves what he does partly because of his keen understanding of the political complexion of modern art in its broader international aspect. This is clearly exemplified by the fine quality of his studies on modern art in a Western European and North American context in the previous volume, and by his ability to bring the insights he offers there to bear on his deeply engaged and richly informed reflections in this volume on the particularities of the Brazilian situation.





**PART 1**

*From Formation to Dismantling*





## Strategies of Occupying Space in Brazil, from Tarsila to Oiticica

### Tarsila

Despite the material distinctions between painting, urbanism, architecture and landscape design, the treatment of space in the visual context of modern Brazilian culture approximates the works of the modernist painter Tarsila do Amaral, and architects Lúcio Costa, Niemeyer and Burle Marx.

Meanwhile, the oeuvre of Hélio Oiticica, whose poetics brings together materials from all these mediums, radically diverges from them when it comes to the issue of space. In what senses does such a comparison matter to the narrow and constricted Brazil of today (2003), the Brazil that is monitored by the IMF, a country in which the mythical figures of 'leisure' and 'cordiality', linked to the symbolic economy of unproductive and wide spaces, no longer circulate?

In Tarsila's painting, unlike that of Anita Malfatti, the contours play a determinant role. Geometrised from their inception, curvilinear and elongated later in the 'Cannibalist' movement [*'Antropófago'*, 1928], in both phases they define the figures in a way that resembles the vertical and horizontal axonometric projections of descriptive geometry.

In these terms, the execution of Tarsila's painting follows a project; it does not include the striking gesture and the thick impasto of the canvasses of Anita Malfatti (the other major Brazilian modernist painter), whose work stages the act of painting as a subjective and dramatic process. With neutral strokes and parsimonious use of paint, Tarsila's pictorial action seems to come from the serial and industrial context of graphic arts.

This does not diminish the work. Rather, it suggests a level of coherence. The decision to prioritise the drawing and the plane is evident in its unfoldings; thus the chromatic areas tend toward uniformity, and the treatment of the canvas seeks to give to it a paper-like smoothness. In short, Tarsila's art results from a projective will that has in the drawing its flagship and that reigns over the plane like a *tabula rasa* or virgin land.

The modernising character of such a project is undeniable in this context. That said, other aspects and factors are condensed in Tarsila's painting. Its colours radiate Brazilian-ness. According to the painter, the colours evoke the

peasant world.<sup>1</sup> In addition to a suggestive and simple inflection, such choice includes a visual objectification of the chief economic resource of the country at that time: the coffee plantations. On the pictorial plane, the harmony between colours and lines, and the uniform luminosity, duplicates the interaction between the capital stocks of coffee and the industry, which had sought to modernise and rationalise the country on their own terms.

If this is true of *Pau-Brasil* [Brazilwood] painting, some variables within this equation change in the 'Cannibalistic' cycle from 1928 onwards. More mature, Tarsila's art dissolves its immediate connections: it replaces the schematic representation of local landscapes with an exploration of Brazilian imagery. National affirmation, based on an initial reference to nature, is supplanted by the incorporation of myths of popular, indigenous, African roots, and so on. In this process, the hardness of the angular lines and the geometrical structure, which had been stylistically hegemonic, become tempered, without losing the planned character of the composition, by more elliptical and sinuous lines, typical of the representation of imaginary things.

This updating, however, develops within the modernist discourse and does not simply negate the previous programme: it seeks a synthesis between models of modernist language, like the serial-geometrical, of cosmopolitan tenor, and signs of Brazilian-ness, once repressed in the academic and classicising discourse of the Brazilian Empire. In Tarsila's 'Cannibalistic' ['Antropófago'] style, the same basic components remain in place: the alliance between the nationalist programme and the analytical content of the poetics, marked by the modernising and internationalising power of formalisation, instituted through lines that legislate hegemonically over the plastic field. The composition remains linear and modular. It brings together elements from previous works and internal series, in which the shapes, while varying in size and combinations, affirm themselves like derivations of a module. This rational poetics does not fear repetition.

Colour, in turn, in the 'linear-canniballistic' order, accounts for the volumetry. It therefore continues to function as the element that maintains the memory of the gaze and of the tactile experience of childhood, the feeling of the agrarian and pre-industrial world. In fact, in Tarsila's painting of the period, the chromatic fields are widened, along with imagery prospection. However,

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1 In explaining her *Pau-Brasil* [Brazilwood] production, Tarsila justified her 'return to tradition, to simplicity', by the intense appeal she felt from encountering 'the colours she loved as a child', on a trip to the historical cities of Minas Gerais, with Blaise Cendrars and other modernists (cited in Zilio 1997, p. 67).

despite gaining in intensity and eloquence, the colours remain subjected to a simple and economic project whose aim is to be universalist, cosmopolitan and rational.

Certainly, such a poetic programme has two goals: to catch up with international modern art, and to broaden the social base of national culture. However, by reiterating childhood sensations in adulthood, this desire to modernise reveals a private angle amid the universalist impulse: a socially protected life, which preserves the continuity between childhood and adult life; a passage destroyed for most without them having any say in the matter, reduced to the mere condition of being part of the workforce. Thus, the modernising impetus stems from someone educated to command and signals, like the rest of Modernism, 'the (populist) attempt of a cultural elite to eliminate class differences and to create an art that would be the expression of nationality as a whole'.<sup>2</sup>

### Brasília or Maracangalha<sup>3</sup>

Continuities can be found if one proceeds along the thread of this review, from the space of the canvas to the space of the territory, from Tarsila's oeuvre to the works of Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer. Lúcio and Tarsila share a certain fondness for simplicity, linearity and geometry, for sober and synthetic lines. Both cherish the simple and functional lines of the rural colonial house, the distinct horizontal profile of old Brazilian farmhouses.

Another thread of continuity runs through the wide and sinuous curves of Tarsila's 'cannibalistic' style and Niemeyer's architecture. In both, the choice of curves stands as an emblem of Brazilian visuality, via the references moving from African culture one moment, to the country's nature the next. The roun-

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<sup>2</sup> See Zilio 1997, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Maracangalha is an imaginary and parodic city mentioned in a song with the same title (1957) by Dorival Caymmi – one of the most important popular songwriters in Brazil. Contemporary to the construction of Brasília, the song ironically alludes to the myth of Brasília as a very modern city, as the singer affirms he would go to Maracangalha, even alone, without his girlfriend, but certainly not without his straw hat. That was the typical condition of the manual workers who migrated from very poor rural regions, mainly in the Northeast of Brazil, to construct Brasília. They lived in slums (actually in huts made of sacks of cement) around the territory of the capital city and, after the inauguration of Brasília in 1961, they gathered in the so-called satellite towns that actually reproduced their poor peasant background, thus very different from the official city of Brasília, limited to the Plano Piloto, designed by Lucio Costa, where the palaces conceived by Oscar Niemeyer were built.

ded features of Tarsila's *The Negress* (1923), which stand out in the foreground against the structure in horizontal bands in the background, foreshadow the preponderance of curves in her 'cannibalistic' painting; Pampulha's curves in turn, in Niemeyer's design, synthetically encompass the horizons of Minas Gerais.

Beyond this order of similarities, the modernist platforms of all three coincide. In these platforms, the power to modernise includes a civilising and universalising ambition. Modernisation implies the operation on a board on which one plays alone. In this way, the power of the subject and their thinking become unified on the basis of a rational and civilised project. This project enjoys the prerogative of top-down planning, properly dividing the space of the country, of which the symbolic, plastic or architectural field supposedly presents itself as a double or simile. Thus one can see in all of them an echo of the coloniser's manorial privilege to legislate unilaterally. The building of the Ministry of Education and Health, commissioned in 1936 by Gustavo Capanema, a minister under Getúlio Vargas's dictatorship, and the Pampulha ensemble (1941) – in short, the milestones of pre-1945 modern architecture in Brazil were born of the commission of the authorities of the so-called 'Estado Novo' ['New State'].<sup>4</sup> Despite these authorities' supposed modern and 'enlightened' credentials, they were hardly democratic.

In the cycle of economic and political expansion, which begins in the post-war period in 1945, Brazilian architecture develops too. (Innovations emerge in the interface between buildings and their natural environment. The 'Brazilian genius' distinguishes itself, as art and architecture critic Mário Pedrosa notes, in the invention of new systems of thermal protection, ventilation, natural light, brise-soleil panels, trusses, cloisters and perforated bricks known as *cobogós* – into the architecture, these incorporate, with remarkable visual imagination, the graphic arts, another landmark of Brazilian excellence at the time. The integration of garden and residence, turning the external space into an extension of the interior, will become another mark of the inventiveness of this architecture.<sup>5</sup>

Burle Marx, a pioneering and exemplary landscape architect, abandons the classic garden beds and short-grass lawns. His art is also innovative in its use of colours. He avoids chromatic divisionism in favour of large spots of colour. As in

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4 That was the self-denomination that the authorities gave to the specific form of dictatorial Brazilian state, from 1937 to 1945. The name was possibly borrowed from Portugal, where Salazar's dictatorship took that name from 1933 onwards, until the 1974 Revolution.

5 See Pedrosa 1981c, pp. 329–32.

Tarsila, a synthesis occurs between features of European modern art and primitive or anticlassical elements, elevated to national emblems. A collaborator of Oscar Niemeyer and Lúcio Costa, Burle Marx uses plants from the Amazon rainforest and others, which are found in backyards or at the roadside. Like Tarsila's colours, these plants constitute elements that are 'familiar to the ambience of the Brazilian countryside' and absent from classicising academic art. Architecture and nature combine, each supplementing the other:

Burle Marx's gardens are also a piece of nature, although they still participate in the life of the house and serve as a sort of cadence to its spatial rhythm. Now their function is to *expand* it, to make it overflow into open spaces.<sup>6</sup>

The presidential palaces, designed by Niemeyer, also serve to integrate buildings and nature: horizontal constructions, surrounded by large verandas, porches or terraces, according to the architectural tradition of the large plantation owners' houses. Along these large verandas, the Alvorada and the Planalto palaces also feature a column/sculpture hybrid whose curves not only stylistically update the bulging of Greek columns, but also suggest another national emblem: the full sails of the 'jangadas' ['rafts']. However, in decorating the porches around the palaces, such columns, in addition to the emblematic dimension they have for the external public, play a different role: they frame the 'Cerrado' landscape.<sup>7</sup> They function in a similar way to the plantation owners' houses built at a highest point of the land, proposing the view of the landscape as a patrimonial item. As in Tarsila's paintings, Niemeyer's columns, these abstract modern pieces, articulate the abstract operations of modern drawing, with typical Brazilian colours, in this case those of the 'Cerrado'. Therefore, while modern, the building presents itself not as an urban element, but as a unit in the landscape, in the manner of the rural colonial house.<sup>8</sup>

In short, a single kind of relationship binds Brazilian modernist architecture: the integration between architecture and nature, or the rational and evaluative use of nature by the architectural project. However, as Pedrosa notes, this takes

6 See Pedrosa 1981b, p. 286; English translation: Pedrosa 2015e, pp. 360–1 (emphasis mine).

7 See, for example, photographs of the Alvorada palace, in Niemeyer 2000, p. 94.

8 The priority given to the conception of the building as an isolated unit in the landscape, intended for contemplation, is also revealed in a recent text by the architect about the project of the Ibirapuera Park auditorium: 'Architecture ... How good to see on the white sheet of paper a palace, a cathedral, a new form emerge, anything that creates the astonishment allowed by reinforced concrete!' (see Niemeyer 2002, p. c3).

place 'to the possible detriment of a deeper, more articulate spatial logic in the play of volumes and interior spaces'.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the excellence of this architecture resides in the valorisation of nature rather than in the urban outline, the latter goal being something that would better correspond to the functionalist directrix of modern architectural rationalism. That is to say, the atavistic perspective of Brazilian modern architecture is still that of the civiliser/coloniser, who springs upon the so-called virgin (sic) land to incorporate it into a so-called civilisation/market. This genetic mark will also be that of the 'Plano Piloto' [Pilot Plan] of Brasília. The geometric-modular structure, without an organic or autochthonous background, which populates the plane with communicative and internationalising shapes, in the works of Tarsila, is also that of the logic expressed by the memorial of Lúcio Costa, for the Brasília competition. On page 2 of the original copy of *Plano Piloto*, the architect-urbanist, in presenting his choice, says frankly, as was his way: 'It was born of a primary gesture of someone who marks a place or takes possession of it: two axes crossing each other according to a right angle, that is, the very sign of the cross'.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, there is also the aspect of planning, under which such architecture attempts to distinguish itself from the colonial tradition. Throughout history, the private advance inland has always occurred according to immediate and unilateral interests. That is, since the captaincies, the first form of privatisation in Brazil, to the expeditions of the *bandeirantes*,<sup>11</sup> and later, during the implementation of the agrarian-exporting latifundia of the coffee growers of São Paulo, the march inland from the coastal areas was invariably chaotic and predatory. Modern constructive actions, in turn, have a planned character. And, for Pedrosa, the prime example of planned territorial occupation would be Brasília.

As such, the critic justifies the creation of the new capital city as an example of a new logic, counterposing it precisely to the opening of the coffee farms by the '*Paulistas*'.<sup>12</sup> The devastation caused by the latifundia created a certain kind of city:

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9 See Pedrosa 1981a, p. 262; English translation: Pedrosa 2015b, p. 343.

10 See Costa 2007b, p. 265.

11 Colonial pioneers and slave hunters.

12 *Paulistas* were the landowners from the state of São Paulo. Pedrosa relies on the thesis of the French geographer Pierre Mombeig, *Pionniers et planteurs de São Paulo* (1952), who links the expansion of the *Paulistas* inland to Portuguese colonisation, both conjugating 'continuous displacement' and a 'tenacious desire for profit'. Hence the instability of the population, 'an uninterrupted race', 'the destruction of the land' ... 'the grass barely grows



The land seller quickly has a few streets laid out ... and the sale of lots starts right there. The first houses ... indicate the future main street, the road itself. There is nothing more practical for the flow of goods ... The pioneers are indifferent to the local environment, because they never stop, in their incessant race.<sup>13</sup>

Brasília, in turn, is 'an old political idea, ingrained through the generations', according to Pedrosa. Politics and planning as forms of rationality would thus be counterposed to the chaos of profit.<sup>14</sup>

The fate of Brasília, however, could be (as in fact it was) different from that of the planned and emancipationist utopia, which should amalgamate the projects of the new capital and agrarian reform. In this sense, Pedrosa had already been warning since 1957:

It is no accident that there is something contradictory hidden within the extremely modern envelope of its concept ... Lúcio Costa's Brasília is a beautiful utopia, but will it have anything to do with the Brasília that Juscelino Kubistchek wants to build?<sup>15</sup>

One of the risks particular to Brasília, isolated as it is from other urban areas, would be to become a seedbed for bureaucracy.<sup>16</sup> Hence Pedrosa's praise of Lúcio's plan, which, unlike the others, 'brilliantly evaded any type of closed

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again in the places where planters settle'. See Pedrosa 1998e, pp. 411–21. For a precise and acute investigation of the critic's positions with regard to Brasília, see O. Arantes 1991, pp. 79–150; O. Arantes 2005b.

13 See Pedrosa 1998e, pp. 416–17.

14 'The spirit that breathes over Brasília ... is the spirit of utopia, the spirit of the plan ... Brasília is a gesture ... of a deep national need: defence of the land, under a continuous and terrible process of destruction ... Brasília could hasten the time of liberation from the excessively immediate submission to the prices of the international market. Brasília only could force the pioneering front to settle ... The national market's pace of expansion will be intensified by the creation of true and new regions, in the centre of the country, around the new capital. Besides, it will not be possible to reequip or better equip these lands without the agrarian reform that is more and more talked about in Brazil. In short, Brasília supposes a geographic, social and cultural remodelling of the entire country ... The time for the economic renaissance will be the time for planning. The time for planning is the end of the advance of pioneering speculation'. See Pedrosa 1998e, pp. 416–17.

15 Pedrosa 1998c, pp. 391, 394; English translation: Pedrosa 2015c, pp. 348–9.

16 In an 'isolated, artificial climate, moral irresponsibility will flourish luxuriantly as the centralism of a new technocratic bureaucracy – all-powerful as a result of its remoteness

form', avoiding the vice of 'bureaucratic centralism ... and the administrative omnipotence of one who makes decisions without the resistances of a clear opinion and of nondispersed contrasting forces'.<sup>17</sup>

A second prophetic warning also had a political tone:

In spite of his creative imagination ... Lúcio Costa tends to yield to anachronisms ... Lúcio's plan envisions the city's monumental axis above the municipal sector, beyond the 'automobile parking lots following one belt-way and the barracks following the other' (quoting the architect). (But Pedrosa exclaims:) What barracks are these? According to him, they are really army troop barracks ... (And he continues:) First, one asks oneself: Why these barracks within the city? Second, what are the specific functions of these troops when the new capital ... is sheltered from sudden enemy landing and can only be reached by air? There is no military justification for detaching land troops ... unless these troops were not meant for defense against external enemies, but, at certain moments deemed opportune, for driving their *tanks*,<sup>18</sup> in the way we know all too well, through the city's central axis, in order to affect the inhabitants themselves and weigh ... upon the deliberations of one or more of the powers of the Republic. But why change, then? Why Brasília? Why dream of utopias?<sup>19</sup>

Hence the subtitle of the text: 'Brasília or Maracangalha?' Today we know very well in what respect Pedrosa's forecasts were right. But returning to the obvious things about Brasília is useful to delimit the historical roots of this pioneering generation of modern architects, as alien to a context of urban reflection. In short, their perspective is just like that of the first modernists, who synthesised modern poetic structures and national elements, previously repressed by academic art. In this symbolic operation, in line with the circumstances and limitations of the historical moment, the national emblems they elaborate suggest an immediate or semi-organic contact with nature.<sup>20</sup> That is to say, in this

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from national life proper, along with the tremendous availability of resources'. See Pedrosa 1998c, p. 392; English translation: Pedrosa 2015c, pp. 348–9.

17 Ibid.

18 The word is written in English in the original.

19 Pedrosa 1998c, pp. 400–1; English translation: Pedrosa 2015c, p. 352.

20 For the sake of nuance and precision, it is worth noting the observation of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda that the Portuguese colonial city, unlike those of Hispanic America, does not reflect 'abstract reason', since it 'does not contradict nature's framework, and its silhouette

perspective, Brazil is much more myth and nature than city and social formation, brought about by the social division of labour.

In addition to primitive incantations, only the visual languages, generated alongside the social sciences and other forms of knowledge, after the installation of an industrial network in the postwar period, will in fact build other cognitive models on the basis of urban issues and the country seen as a social-historical formation. The problems of Brazilian cities are then posed more clearly for the new architects and artists, in light of democratic demands and mass production. A combination of urban issues, inherent to such patterns, gives rise to new challenges and achievements for architecture: to meet the universalisation of the rights of use of the soil and of the urban environment, to similarly equate the internal/external flows and connections, to propose plural environments, anonymous structures, etc.

### Oiticica and Mangueira

The work of Oiticica constitutes a milestone in this new perspective. Unlike early modernism, and resuming the rational re-elaboration of these questions by Oswald and Tarsila in the 1930s, Oiticica does not identify exclusion in ethnic terms. That is, the figures of the Indian and the black man are not shown as doubles of nature; rather, both are seen to represent the slum dweller, the one excluded from the economic-legal order of basic property: housing.

Oiticica's quest for a new conception of space is linked to the Neo-Concrete movement's research into a new reciprocal relationship between the work of art and its surroundings, including its immediate public, as a subject of observation elevated to the new condition of participant or experimenter. This suspends the inside/outside limits and calls for the experience of space in an intrinsic connection with the experience of time – since it requires mobility on the part of the observer. Hence the notion of *participation* as an active relationship between the observer and the aesthetic object.

In this way, the separation between life and art and the corresponding idea of contemplation are both overcome. In order to prompt the mobility of the observer, to anti-contemplative participation, in 1960 Oiticica abandons two-dimensional painting in favour of spatial relief, a kind of aerial labyrinth, painted wooden boards, hung by nylon threads, the Nuclei [*Núcleos*], as he

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is linked to the line of the landscape'. See Holanda 1969, p. 76; English translation: Holanda 2012, p. 81.

called them. However, it was in the Mangueira neighbourhood in 1964, in defiance of the moment under the weight of the military coup, where the decision to revivify the relationship between life and art took on a different kind of concreteness, resulting in the concept of *environmental art* as *antiart*:

My whole experience in the Mangueira neighbourhood with people of all kinds taught me that social and intellectual differences are the cause of unhappiness – I had some ideas I thought were very abstract, but they suddenly became real: creativity is inherent in anyone, the artist only inflames, sets fire to and frees people from their conditioning.<sup>21</sup>

What did Oiticica discover in Mangueira? First, a new notion of shelter, clothing or temporary housing, in short, a mobile and provisional, and therefore temporal, way to occupy the space, which he would call *Parangolé* (a slang term *appropriated* by Oiticica).<sup>22</sup> This is just a cape, tent or banner.<sup>23</sup> From the *Parangolé*, which concerns the body – and for which the *Parangolé* acts as a deconditioner – Oiticica moves on to more comprehensive constructions: other shelters, in this case conspicuously architectural, like the *Penetrables* and *Nests*. While the *Parangolé* came from dance, the *Penetrables* and *Nests* come directly from organic architecture and, always in process, from the *favelas* [slums] of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>24</sup>

Deep down, though, the *Parangolé* itself, engendered from the overlapping or collage of fabrics, was already nourished by the idea of the *favela* space:

The architecture of the *favela* implies the character of the *Parangolé*, like the structural organicity between the elements that constitute it and the internal circulation and dismemberment of these constructions; there are no sudden changes from bedroom to living room or to the kitchen, but the essence which defines each part, which connects to another

21 Oiticica 1997f, p. 135 (with English translation).

22 For Oiticica's explanation of that appropriation, see Oiticica 2009b, p. 269 (originally published in *Interview* magazine, Rio de Janeiro, April 1980).

23 'It all started with my experience with samba, with the discovery of the hills, of the organic architecture of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro (and consequently of others, like the palafittes of the Amazon) and especially the spontaneous anonymous constructions in big urban centres – the art of the streets, of unfinished things, of vacant lots, etc.'. See Oiticica 1997e, p. 124; Oiticica 2011e, p. 108 (English translation on p. 237). See also Jacques 2001, pp. 23–42.

24 See Paola Jacques's interesting study quoted above, which includes many pointers in this regard.

(by) continuity. The same takes place in the thin walls of construction sites, on another plane. And so in all those popular nooks and popular constructions, generally improvised, that we see every day. The same occurs in fairs, beggars' houses ... etc.<sup>25</sup>

The *Penetrables*, like the *Parangolés*, are made with remnants of other things. Oiticica appropriates fragments in the way slum dwellers do when they build their homes. The idea of *appropriation*, in which the issue of property is already in question, corresponds to a new level of *participation*. *Appropriation* turns to the things of the world, which, like anyone, Oiticica finds in the streets.<sup>26</sup> The artist who proposes *practices* succeeds the creator of objects. The *practices* are born of propositions that, like open ideas, do not elaborate a closed object or form, but combine with the disappearance of the art object and of its correlated contemplative act. These are replaced by so-called *antiart* or *suprasensory practices*, in which 'the true making (of the work) is the experience of the individual', who is 'dealienated' when objectifying 'his or her ethical and spatial behaviour'.<sup>27</sup> Thus, 'contrary to what a conventional architect does, Oiticica, instead of creating a space for a certain programme of uses and functions, proposes the space to then let possible uses and functions be discovered'.<sup>28</sup>

Opposing the work of art, *appropriation* and *proposition* found *environmental art*, which has the declared purpose of transforming the socioeconomic structure. Oiticica affirms:

such a position can only be ... a totally anarchic position ... All that is oppressive, socially and individually, is in opposition to it ... the *social-environmental* position is ... incompatible ... with any law that is not determined by a defined inner need ... it is the recovery of the confidence of the individual in his or her dearest intuitions and longings.<sup>29</sup>

The paradox of popular constructive art, which combines scarcity and abundant inventiveness, appears in Nelson Cavaquinho's verse: 'our shacks are castles in our imagination'. In poetry, the transformation of 'shack' into 'castle' is activated, in the words of the preceding verse, by way of the 'expressive force' of

25 Oiticica 1997a, p. 87; Oiticica 2011a, p. 71 (English translation on p. 218).

26 Oiticica 1997b, p. 103; Oiticica 2011b, p. 82 (English translation on p. 224). See also Lagnado 2002, pp. 60–1.

27 Oiticica 1997d, p. 128; Oiticica 2011d, p. 106 (English translation on p. 236).

28 Jacques 2001, p. 83. See also pp. 110–11.

29 Oiticica 1997b, p. 103; Oiticica 2011b, pp. 81–2 (English translation on p. 224).

the ‘modest Manguera verses’.<sup>30</sup> This conception of poetic potency is consistent with Oiticica’s notion of *art of adversity*. Yet today, given the overcoming of military dictatorship – still in power at the time of Oiticica’s death in 1980 – and given the political maturity of the workers’ movement, the overcoming of the juridical-political concept of property – which restricts access to land to a minority – can become more than the vow of a poet. It can become the political goal of the majority. Art, urbanism and architecture can be considered in these terms.

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30 The lyrics say: ‘Manguera is a barn of aces like me/ Portela also had/ Paulo who died/ But the “sambista” [the *samba* musician] lives eternally in our hearts/ The verses of Manguera are modest/ But there’s always expressive force/ Our shacks are castles in our imagination/ Oh, oh, oh, oh, it was Manguera that arrived [*Manguera é celeiro de bambas como eu/ Portela também teve/ O Paulo que morreu/ Mas o sambista vive eternamente no coração da gente/ Os versos de Manguera são modestos/ Mas há sempre força de expressão/ Nossos barracos são castelos em nossa imaginação/ Ô, ô, ô, ô foi Manguera quem chegou*]. See Nelson Cavaquinho and Geraldo Queiroz, *Sempre Manguera*.

## 'Free Form': Brazilian Mode of Abstraction or a Malaise in History

### Absence of History and 'Free Form'

Unlike in Mexico and Argentina, in Brazil, art history is not an institutionalised discipline, let alone in the form of a critical-reflective system.

In 1947, Lourival Gomes Machado began *Retrato da Arte Moderna do Brasil* [Portrait of Brazil's Modern Art] with the affirmation: 'The first Brazilian art historian, systematic, with a general view of the cultural and intellectual development, and capable of interpretation – such a person is yet to come'.<sup>1</sup> The influential critics Lourival Machado and Mário Pedrosa – the latter the most substantial and decisive figure in Brazilian visual criticism – both confronted the issue in 1947, 1952 and 1973, respectively, but with limited results.

Neither a book nor an author will carry out the redemption; the judgement remains valid and enduring. There are many reasons for the gap and there is no way to address them all here. The fact is that there is a predominance of monographic studies that examine an artistic movement, considered per se, in the light of its own assumptions and alone in its positivity. The early 1970s saw the emergence of a dynamic art market as a result of the so-called 'Brazilian miracle' and of the repression of social and political commitment in the visual arts. This prompted waves of studies focusing on the authorial point of view and constituting the author as positivity and commodity. We remain immersed in this scene, which is inherent to a 'system of authors'.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Lourival went on to say: 'Superb monographs sometimes appear and on many occasions a monograph – for example, on Aleijadinho – works as the study of an epoch. This is not enough, however. Studies will be provisionally missing in which, more than the well-characterised great artist or period, connections, intermediate passages and transitions constitute the central interest of historians. And, unfortunately, the only true history is the one which shows how culture moves through transformation, how the standards acquire a measure of evolution, of growth.' See Machado 1947, p. 11. On the same issue, see also Pedrosa 1998a, pp. 135–52; English translation: Pedrosa 2015a, pp. 177–87. See also Pedrosa 1986, pp. 251–8; republished in Pedrosa 1995b, pp. 217–84; for the English translation, see Pedrosa 2015i, pp. 153–68. See also Chapter 6, 'Formation and Dismantling of a Brazilian Visual System', in this volume.

2 For more on this, see Chapter 6, 'Formation and Dismantling of a Brazilian Visual System' and Chapter 13, 'International Benefit Society of Friends of Form', in this volume.

At the same time, history and literary criticism developed systematically in Brazil, according to their own intersections and the elaboration of an 'internal causality'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, to answer the main question of this colloquy [UNAM, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2011] about the continuity/discontinuity of the histories of art in Latin America, in the Brazilian case, we need to resort to literature's model of systematised reflexion and its established links with other national issues.

However, in this sense, we can also use the architectural and urbanistic discourse of Brasília (1956–60), which was based on a systematic ambition to synthesise Brazilian visuality. Conceived as both a national capital and a flagship of its alleged modernisation, Brasília was referred to by Argentine historian Adrián Gorelik as a 'museum of the avant-garde'. In fact, in its urban planning and monument-buildings, Brasília's project implies a systematic narrative, which encompasses the colonial past and the origin and nature of Brazilian modern art, which also includes a *neo-primitive* discourse. For this reason, one can say that Brasília's case also serves as an eventual objectivation of a systematic discourse on modern art in Brazil.<sup>4</sup>

The so-called 'free form' [*forma livre*] is the corollary of such a discursive complex. It was engendered in the architectural work of Oscar Niemeyer in 1940–2, as he worked on the project for the Pampulha ensemble (Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais). The notion of 'free form', favoured by 'pan-Americanism' and the circumstances of the war effort, soon brought international recognition to Brazilian modern architecture.

'Free form', in its license or deviation from Corbusian functionalism, prefigures the analogous case, at the end of the next decade (1959 ff.), of neo-concrete art, dissident from the imperatives of concrete art and also internationally celebrated today. Thus, both modern architecture and neo-concrete art are now regarded as emblems of the proclaimed 'talent' of Brazilian authors.

'Free form' is therefore the objectivated expression of what could be called the 'Brazilian propensity to formalism'. Where does this trend come from? On what socio-historical experience is it based?

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3 For the notion of 'internal causality', central to the notion of 'cultural system', see Candido 2006a; 2006b; 2006c, pp. 11–20, 25–32; Candido 2002, pp. 93–120. On the notion of 'visual system' and its initial configuration in Brazil in the 1950s, see Chapter 3, 'All this Geometry, where does it come from, where does it go?' and Chapter 6, 'Formation and Dismantling of a Brazilian Visual System', in this volume. On the transition from geometric abstraction (concrete and neo-concrete) to new figuration, see Chapter 4, 'Trees of Brazil', in this volume.

4 The idea of Brasília as a 'museum of the avant-garde' had great importance in the elaboration of this text; the usage extracted from such a formulation is in turn the entire responsibility of the present work. For the idea of Brasília as a museum, see Gorelik 2005, pp. 151–90.



### Brazilian Propensity to Formalism

In *Roots of Brazil* [*Raízes do Brasil*, 1936], historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda gave an incisive explanation as to the origins of the propensity found among patriarchal families in Brazil to the handling of forms, or to what he called 'talent': it derives from the power that the values and customs of the *casas-grandes* [Portuguese term for the large rural houses of the landowner, usually also a slave owner] exerted since the colonial period on the Brazilian social and symbolic formation. Ease and dexterity in handling forms would have its roots in the aversion to work that the rural oligarchies, when they migrated to the cities, transmitted to their descendants, who adopted liberal professions and who chose practices and forms averse to objectivity, precision, and real issues. The late and incipient Brazilian educational system, fundamentally clerical and private, conformed to such designs. It combined its original segregationism with a cultivation of forms dissociated from reality.

Holanda perfectly captured the source of the problem:

The entire structure of our colonial society was based on a rural environment. This fact is essential to understanding the circumstances that continued to govern us, directly or indirectly, long after independence. The consequences of the long-standing rural dominance are still palpable today.<sup>5</sup>

This diagnosis remains valid today! A university thesis written by Luiz Recamán in 2002<sup>6</sup> shows that Brazilian modern architecture is based on *anti-urban* principles. It thus reveals, through a strict analysis of the architectural and urbanistic discourse, the long hegemony of the active principle of the colonial order, which was translated into the dictatorship of agrarian forms over urban ones.

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5 'The life of the colony was effectively concentrated on rural properties during the initial centuries of European occupation: the cities were virtually, if not actually, their dependencies'. So began the critique of the basic phenomenon, which, pages later, went into the diagnosis of the love of 'talent': 'One can make a connection between those circumstances and a continuing feature of our social life: the supreme value usually given to certain qualities of imagination and "intelligence" ... The universal prestige of the word "talent," with the overtones that word has especially in the regions where colonial and slaveholding agriculture ... undoubtedly came from the greater dignity that Brazilians attributed to the simple exercise of intelligence as opposed to activities requiring some physical effort'. See Holanda 1969, pp. 41, 50; English translation: Holanda 2012, pp. 43–4, 53.

6 See Recamán 2002. A summary version of some of the outlines of the thesis can be found in Recamán 2004, pp. 106–39.

In summary, Recamán's argument is that an *anti-urban* perspective provides the constant of the system formed by Brazilian modern architecture in the 20 years after its first totem, that is, the design of the building of the Ministry of Education and Health (1936–7, Lúcio Costa and team),<sup>7</sup> towards the project for Brasília (ca. 1957–60, O. Niemeyer and L. Costa), including the second chapter, the design of the Brazilian pavilion at the New York World's Fair (1939–40, L. Costa and O. Niemeyer) as well as the third icon, the Pampulha ensemble (1940–2, O. Niemeyer). Conceived always as isolated units in the landscape, such buildings were surrounded by empty space, by simulated or ephemeral situations (New York World's Fair), or by a *tabula rasa* of social relations (the deserted region of Pampulha).<sup>8</sup>

### Nuptials and Fruits

In short, the system of Brazilian modern architecture springs from the scene of the origin of Brazilian modernisation. It is the distinctive offspring, according to Recamán, of the union between two things: the process of conservative

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7 Under the coordination of Lúcio Costa and relying on Le Corbusier's consultancy, the team included Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Carlos Leão, Ernani Vasconcelos, Jorge Moreira and Oscar Niemeyer.

8 See Recamán 2002, pp. 84–122. On the social and political circumstances that led to the construction of the Pampulha ensemble, Pedrosa affirmed in a conference in France in 1953: 'the Pampulha complex was ... a veritable oasis, the fruit of the period's ... political conditions, when a group of plenipotentiary rulers, for love of their prestige, decided, like absolutist princes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to build this magnificent whim .../ The "miracle" of the Ministry of Education could not have occurred were it not for its "grandiosity" and its imposing program. Without the taste of great comfort, of fruition, of the authority and wealth of a state governor with unlimited powers ... Pampulha would never have been commissioned or built. A part of the new architecture's ostentatious side undoubtedly comes from its initial exchanges with the dictatorship. Certain aspects of experimental gratuitousness in the Pampulha buildings proceed from the program of caprice and luxury of the small local dictator'. See Pedrosa 1981a, pp. 257–9; English translation: Pedrosa 2015b, pp. 340–1. The priority given to the conception of the building as an isolated unit in the landscape, destined above all for exhibition and contemplation, also reveals itself in a recent text of the architect about the design of the Ibirapuera Park auditorium: 'Architecture ... How good to see on the white sheet of paper a palace, a cathedral, a new form emerge, anything that creates the astonishment allowed by reinforced concrete!'; see Niemeyer 2002, p. c3. On the architect's reservations about his design – due to its immediate proximity to other buildings (in the middle of the urban centre of São Paulo) – for the Copan building (São Paulo, 1953) – today seen, however, as one of the symbols of the metropolis, see Recamán 2002, pp. 14–48.

modernisation – of an oligarchic-rural social formation which moves towards industrialisation – and the seductive power of a modernising doctrine. Such was Corbusier's architecture, conceived to reform and adjust the long-lived European cities, born of medieval local commerce (fairs) and crafts. Its goal: to lead such old towns into the Taylorist programme of monopolistic industry.

However, whence comes the early maturing and unique vigour of the fruit of a union of such diverse origins and, thus, such heterogeneity?

In other words, what terms secured the union of interests and practices between the conservative transition of the Brazilian productive system – from the agrarian oligarchic mode towards the monopolistic commercial-industrial system – and a modernising technique brought by the French-Swiss functionalist architect? A union grounded on a planning inherent to industrialism and hence linked to a technique atavistically akin to all revolutions – albeit revolutions concerning only techniques and production. That is to say, any revolution whatsoever, so long as it does not affect those in power, and can guarantee the monopoly of goods and the empire over labour.

The thesis of this work is that the vector of the successful alliance was the common *Bonapartist* strategy, in Marx's sense of the term.<sup>9</sup> That is to say, the strategy of activating the simultaneously utopian and positivist discourse of modern architecture as *ersatz* or simulacrum of the political process, emptied in favour of the free play of modern forms.

With Bonapartist resourcefulness and state funding, the laboratory stage of the experiments was quickly completed. Then there was the triumphal emergence of 'free form', in Pampulha, as a fetish form of architecture, as Recamán's study demonstrates,<sup>10</sup> destined for exhibition, speculation, and value-adding

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9 The notion of hypertrophied bureaucracy, either armed (Army) or technical (planners or the like), which seizes the government when a balance of forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat prevents the direct political exercise of power by the bourgeoisie, belongs to Marx's analyses of the ascension of the second Bonaparte in the third part of *The Class Struggles in France* (1850), and also of what he calls 'Napoleonic ideas', in the seventh part of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). See Marx and Engels 2006, and Marx 2002. The issue is taken up and updated by Trotsky in several writings; see, notably, chapter 1, 'Bonapartismo y fascismo' in Trotsky 1973, pp. 177–82.

10 'A good part of the solutions found in Pampulha is due to its strenuous visibility, a factor of interconnection that gives unity to the whole. The small buildings are at once objects on display to be intensely admired (which is the reason for their isolation and for the great distance between them), and platforms for contemplation of the ensemble itself. Each of them stimulate, through the disposition of their architecture, the visual connection with the other units. In order to achieve this effect of separation and connections, the distance is fundamental. Not only the distance between the ensemble and the city, but the

processes. Then in Brazil – a tropical territory politically frozen by authoritarianism – modern architecture took on a familiar air – as familiar as other transplanted seedlings and practices: sugarcane, coconut, the latifundia system, slavery, gold mining, coffee, etc.

Today, who can imagine Brazil without such pearls? The great mercantile-colonial invention was, above all, the slave-based latifundia – the molecule of the empire-form – from which derive the other qualities and comparative advantages that are still regarded as Brazilian excellencies. What is the place of Brasília and its essential figure, the ‘free form’, in such a necklace that so closely surrounds the imperial territorial form, another legacy of the colonial past?

### A Modern Pearl

In addition to this architecture’s affiliation with the employers and patriarchy that still monopolise the powers of the state, let us scrutinise its unique style and seductive power. What is the gene of the emblematic molecule of the Brazilian ‘talent’ for modern architecture: the ‘free form’?

Since Max Bill’s criticism of ‘free form’,<sup>11</sup> it has become customary to trace it back to the baroque-religious colonial style. Such a claim merely parallels Costa’s praise of civilian colonial architecture.<sup>12</sup> But Niemeyer’s dissent before the lesson of functionalism, which he never ceased to recognise, is not of an architectural tenor; it is rather of an artistic origin – and as such one can assume it was approved, as a filial license,<sup>13</sup> by Corbusier.

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separation of the architectural objects from one another, through a medium, which is the lake’s emptiness. The lake intensifies the visual contact and establishes a vague distance of observation. This emptiness is the zero level of sociability and history. We could add: the zero level of geography, since we are no longer talking about the position of an observer in the coordinates of the perspectival space but outside of it, where the cognitive relations of proportion, of measurement and action (praxis), are annulled’. Recamán 2002, p. 103.

- 11 One of the few to criticise the ‘free form’ – soon nationally and internationally celebrated – was Max Bill, an architect, sculptor and mentor from the Ulm School (Switzerland). See Aquino 1953, pp. 38–9.
- 12 For the first of Costa’s many appreciations of colonial architecture, see Costa 2007a, pp. 12–16. The view presented in the article was later reassessed with respect to the criticism of Aleijadinho’s work, but reiterated as regards the praising of colonial architecture.
- 13 A close relationship with such a tenor explains Niemeyer’s general and cordial acceptance, that is to say, an acceptance somewhere between magnanimous and reverent, of the late incorporation of Corbusier’s proposal in the winning solution (by Niemeyer), in the competition among an international team of architects gathered by Wallace Harrison to

Niemeyer's deviation from the functionalist line – through the dual and ambivalent tenor of his mode of abstraction – rests primarily on a naturalist and primitive aspect, inherent to Brazilian modernism – much more Art Deco than was claimed. 'Free form' draws directly from the 'neo-primitivist' lexicon of the *Pau-Brasil* [Brazilwood] and 'Cannibalistic' art of Tarsila do Amaral. Between the broad and sinuous curves of Tarsila's drawings and the 'free forms', continuities are woven, evident in the mere visual comparison of Niemeyer's forms with those of Tarsila's paintings.<sup>14</sup> In both, the features claim the essence of the 'Brazilian man', and intend to stylise popular forms and Brazilian visuality. Underlying such an order of similarities, which betoken their shared late-modernising and autocratic premise, lies the conviction that they can do so from above and by means of drawing.<sup>15</sup>

### Allegories and 'Comparative Advantages'

The book *O Primitivismo em Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade e Raul Bopp* [Primitivism in Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade and Raul Bopp, 2010],<sup>16</sup> a scholarly, precise and acute piece of research by Abílio Guerra, explores the modernist mythology around the 'Brazilian man'. Guerra shows how the myths of the 'Brazilian man' in his triple racial origin – European, indigenous and African – and his supposed direct link to the telluric dimension, borrow from

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choose the design for the United Nations Headquarters building in New York, in 1947. For a detailed account of the case by Niemeyer, see Niemeyer 2000, pp. 24–9.

14 For similarities between their lines, compare, for example, the combination of curved and geometric shapes in one of Tarsila's paintings, *The Negress* [*A Negra*, 1923], with the front façade of the Church of São Francisco (1940, Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais), by Niemeyer. The curvilinear volumes of the rear façade of the church can also be compared with another work by Tarsila: *Landscape with Palm Trees* [*Paisagem com Palmeiras*, c. 1928]. For more details, see Chapter 1, 'Strategies of Spaces Occupation in Brazil, from Tarsila to Oiticica', in this volume.

15 The languages of Tarsila and Niemeyer share, in addition to the manorial privilege of modernising and legislating, some of the elements disseminated in their contents, such as the memory of the childhood gaze and tactile experiences. Memories that carry the feeling of an agrarian and preindustrial world, typical of the proprietary class, with the mnemonic identity privilege of the 'continuity between childhood and adult life ... destroyed for the majority, with no power to choose and reduced to the mere condition of workforce'. See Chapter 1, 'Strategies of Occupying Space in Brazil', in this volume.

16 Guerra 2010.

notions and parameters of nineteenth-century European powers' colonialist and positivist hygienism and anthropology. However, such discussion, despite being interesting and politically relevant, would divert us from the purpose of showing – in architectural and visual terms – how the widely accepted 'free form' and the systematised narrative of Brazilian modern art are rooted in the Brazilian social and symbolic formation,<sup>17</sup> marked by the latifundia system.

If it is not possible here to detail the lexical and syntactical relationship between 'free form' and the *Pau-Brasil* movement, it is nevertheless worth noting that the artistic origin of the 'talent' of Niemeyer's lines, which prevails in the design over any other considerations, directly meets the modernist promise – neo-primitive by its own reckoning –<sup>18</sup> of creating a symbiosis between

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17 Even a critic with a Trotskyist background and militancy, and with the reflective reach of Mário Pedrosa, comes to consider as a kind of 'comparative advantage' for Brazilian modern art the existence of primitive populations and cultures in the country, given the situation of the European avant-garde that had to look for them elsewhere. Thus, he affirmed in 1952: 'In the statuettes and masks of black sculpture, Western artists felt the concrete, real presence of a form of feeling, and architecture of thought, a subtle expression of the most profound forces of life' [Guillaume 1926, p. 13; English translation: Guillaume 1999, pp. 1–2], extracted from the civilization whence they came. To them, the formal and spiritual power immanent in those sculptured objects was like the revelation of a new message. Western culture [sic] had lost the formal meaning of the drawing ... / The conquest of archaic cultures by European modernism coincided with the universalist and primitive thinking of Mário de Andrade ... / This natural, anti-ideological, direct Brazil retains an initial purity that Tarsila also attempted to reproduce ... / Primitivism was the doorway through which the modernists penetrated Brazil, and it served as their Brazilian naturalization papers. The victory of the historical and proto-historical archaic arts and those of the new contemporary primitives facilitated the discovery of Brazil by the modernists. It was under their influence that, soon after the [Modern Art] Week, the movements of *Pau-Brasil* [Brazilwood] and of *Antropofagismo* [Cannibalism] were born. / And so, unlike their super-civilized European role models, Brazilian modernists did not need to travel to the exotic latitudes of Africa or Oceania to renew their strength in the purer and more vitalized sources of certain primitive cultures'. Alongside the primitivism of Mário de Andrade, Pedrosa soon also recovers the primitivism of Oswald: '[This] was truly the conscious theorist and creator of Brazilian primitivism ... / For love of poetry, of the real and concrete sources of life, he also reduces Brazil to its most earthly and physical realities. Brazilwood. His is therefore a primordial nationalism, irreducible and anti-erudite like that of Mário de Andrade'. See Pedrosa 1998a, pp. 142–5; English translation: 2015a, pp. 180–2.

18 O. Andrade 1924, pp. 128–34; 1928, pp. 135–41; English translation: O. Andrade 1991, pp. 38–47. On the neo-primitivism of Brazilian modernists, see Guerra 2010, pp. 241–300.

construction and nature.<sup>19</sup> A mythology of the direct relationship between nature and 'talent', as a natural attribute of such a relationship, explains the glaring indifference of 'free form' to the urban environment, neglected in favour of emptiness or immediate juxtapositions with nature.

In Pampulha, the focus of the extra-urban project, as Recamán noted, consisted of the specular surface of the lake, whose reflective function was decisive for the buildings' installation and the reciprocal visual interpenetration of the forms.<sup>20</sup>

What are the terms of the imaginative power or symbiotic strategy in the designs of Brasília?<sup>21</sup>

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19 See Pedrosa 1981c, pp. 329–32 (without English translation). See also Pedrosa 1981a, p. 262; English translation: Pedrosa 2015b, p. 343.

20 'The new set is not structured ... in any plan or city, but around a lake, which clears the visual elements for better contemplation, duplicated by reflexions in the water. All the new buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer face the emptiness of the lake. Even the chapel turns its back on the street (which would one day be the connection with the city), and open up, with the entirely glazed east façade, to the structuring lake ... The extroversion of the units is completed by the introversion of the Pampulha ensemble, where the dazzling play of visual elements established between the parts and the whole – frenetic and incessant vectors – does not exceed, either physically or conceptually, the limits of the restricted universe orbiting the lake'. See Recamán 2002, pp. 101–2; see also p. 103. On the decisive function of the image in the Pampulha and Brasília projects, see also Niemeyer's declarations: 'I recall my first meeting with JK [Juscelino Kubitschek], when he told me enthusiastically: "Niemeyer, you will design the Pampulha neighbourhood [sic]. An area on the edge of a reservoir with a casino, church and a restaurant". And, with the same optimism with which twenty years later he came to build Brasília, he concluded: "I need the casino design tomorrow". A demand that I met, working an entire night in a hotel in the city. / Pampulha was the beginning of Brasília. The same enthusiasm. ... How joyful JK was when he took us by speedboat, late at night, to see the buildings reflected in the waters of the dam! ... I remember the casino functioning, the onyx-lined walls, the aluminium columns, the swell people of the city elegantly showing off down the ramps connecting the ground floor to the games room and the nightclub. It was the festive and sophisticated atmosphere that JK desired'. See Niemeyer 2000, pp. 18–19.

21 I will not comment here on some interesting and admirable achievements in some of Niemeyer's urban buildings, for example, in the Copan building (1953, São Paulo), that use mixed solutions combining commercial purposes on the ground floor, and residential spaces on the upper floors. However, the choice of focus here is due to not only the economy of argumentation, but also the priority given to the analysis of the Brazilian combination of state power and modern architecture. This was the motive of the alliance between Kubitschek and Niemeyer, projected from the association on a municipal scale on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, between 1940 and 1942, to the enterprise of building the

## The Porches and Their Horizons

The standard platforms in which lies the fulcrum of the imagistic relation of symbiosis or of hypnotic capture of general perception<sup>22</sup> are the colonnades of the verandas of the presidential palaces: Planalto and Alvorada.

Let us examine how their symbolic tenor or value is shaped. Both palaces are horizontal buildings, surrounded by large porches or verandas, in the tradition of the latifundia's *casas-grandes*. The architect thus declared at the time:

The Alvorada palace ... suggests elements from the past – the horizontal orientation of the façade, the wide veranda I designed with the purpose of protecting the palace, the chapel reminding us, in the far end of the composition, of our old *casas-grandes*.<sup>23</sup>

Identification with the point of view of the great landowners in the designs of the presidential palaces, which also occurred in the palace of the Supreme Federal Court – *et pour cause* ... – created a scheme of columns which soon became the trademark of the so-called New City.<sup>24</sup> They are not fortuitous. Neither the

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new national capital, some 15 years later. On the Copan building, see footnote 8 above, and Recamán 2002, pp. 14–48.

- 22 For a discussion on the recurrent regime of the poetic-structural relationships of symbiosis or fusion between the 'self' and the 'other', and of the symbolic role they play in many decisive works of Brazilian culture, see Pasta 2010, pp. 13–25; Pasta 1997, pp. 159–70; and Pasta 2002, pp. 37–41.
- 23 Niemeyer 1958, pp. 3–6, cited in Gorovitz 2008, p. 232. For a discussion of the socio-cultural premises of the architectural typology of rural chapels, compared to urban cathedrals, see Holanda 1969, pp. 110–12; English translation: Holanda 2012, pp. 119–22.
- 24 The power of the graphic communication of the columns of the presidential palaces was immediately noticed, just like the slender and imposing raised pilotis of the headquarters of the Ministry of Education and Health in 1937. Thanks to Niemeyer's suggestion, the pilotis were modified and raised in relation to the original Corbusian design for the ministry building, according to which they ought to have been much lower and to have more closely resembled the standardised and laconic sobriety of the functionalist model. Thus, the raised pilotis, following Niemeyer's proposal – combining the monumentality and, later, through 'free form', the allegorical-national aspiration (see below) with the modern style – became the trademark of the new Brazilian architecture. It was therefore the reference to the unprecedented height of the pilotis that probably motivated Lúcio Costa's metaphor about the new Brazilian architecture: 'a very smart girl, with a clean face and thin legs', cited in O. Arantes 1998, p. 118. For examples of quotes from the New City logo by vernacular architecture, see Gorelik 2005, p. 158.



talented gesture of the architect – who, like Tarsila, in his spontaneous-looking lines, revives the childhood memory of life on a farm – nor the advertising predestination of the architectural line, which is born already as a logo or graphic work. The columns' design includes a rather seductive and ambiguous artifice, which oscillates between abstract form and an ethnic-cultural allusion, aspiring to become an emblem.

Thus, in the Planalto and Alvorada palaces, hybrids between column and sculpture evoke through their curves, one arranged sideways and the other frontally, another Brazilian emblem: the full sails of the *jangadas* [rafts] – transmuted into national symbols since the nationalist propaganda of the Vargas administration.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, according to the *casa-grande* typology, the ornaments on the porches – or monuments, for those looking from the outside – frame the *cerrado* landscape for those looking from the inside,<sup>26</sup> lodging the latter within the private perspective, as if they were elevated above ground level and above the common or pedestrian plane of the city.

### The Brazilian Mode of Abstraction

In short, the building in its abstract forms claims to be modern, but it also hints at popular memory. At the same time, in its installation and structural reference, it does not stand as an urban element, but objectively rather like a rural building, that is, like a unit in the landscape and mainstay of the absolute privileges and prerogatives of large property.

It is worth asking: is the architectural discourse, which associates the state with the rural manorial perspective, a license of authorial talent – or an exception before the urbanist functionalist logic of Brasília's *Plano Piloto* (Pilot Plan)? Only this time the latter is supposedly republican, at least according to those who presented the so-called New City and its super-blocks as if they were intended for egalitarian coexistence.

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25 The incorporation of the image of rafts to the set of national symbols motivated the filmmaker Orson Welles to come to Brazil, invited by the so-called *Estado Novo* (New State: a denomination possibly borrowed from Salazar's Portuguese dictatorship) within the framework of actions of pan-Americanism, to make a film about the *jangadeiros* ('raft fishermen'). For photographs of the filming of *It's All True*, Ceará, 1942, see Schwartz 2002, p. 367. Filmmaker Rogério Sganzerla focused directly on the comings and goings and tensions of the project in two of his films: *Nem Tudo é Verdade* [Not Everything is True, 1986] and *Tudo é Brasil* [Everything is Brazil, 1997].

26 See, for example, photographs of the Alvorada palace in Niemeyer 2000, p. 94.

From the terms that the urban planner Lúcio Costa used as the premise of the *Plano Piloto*, one does not get a sense of egalitarian cohabitation, but rather memories of the old order. Therefore, the Plan's description sounds like an act of considered possession, as a gesture with a sense of exploration too, in the moulds of colonial tradition. Thus, in Lúcio Costa's own words: '[T]his solution ... was born of a primary gesture of someone who ... takes possession ... two axes crossing each other at right angles, that is, the very sign of the cross'.<sup>27</sup>

The contradiction is not simply a matter of discourse; it is not restricted to words. Photographs by Marcel Gautherot present with pungent and sharp clarity the contrast between the apparent purity of geometric shapes and the modes of rustic and intensive manual labour such as those of the latifúndia.<sup>28</sup>

An analogous contradiction lies in the issue of workers' housing, which was not provided. Niemeyer admitted that Brasília's project did not include houses for workers, who, after the construction process, were supposed to return to their regions of origin.<sup>29</sup>

27 Costa 2007b, p. 265. It should be noted that, if one is to consider the typology of *Roots of Brazil*, Costa's reference is Hispanic rather than Lusitanian – but the famous studies of Costa on Jesuit architecture (1937), as well as his design for the museum of missionary art (1940) in São Miguel das Missões (Rio Grande do Sul), somewhat authorised him to synthesise Hispanic and Lusitanian traditions. For Costa's studies on Jesuit architecture and the Missions, see Costa 1941, pp. 9–104. On the seven distinguished entries by the jury for the *Plano Piloto* competition (1956/7), see Braga 2010.

28 There is a series of photos of the construction of Brasília, taken by Gautherot, that seem to fix in images the assumptions and unfoldings of Costa's words in his memorial, linking the *Plano Piloto* to colonial tradition. Thus, the photos focus on the contradiction between the purity of geometric shapes and intensive manual work in moulds similar to those of the rural latifúndia; moulds that denote, as someone said, that the building sites of civil engineering incorporate in the urban situation the super-exploitation of labour of the latifúndia model. For Gautherot's photographs, see Gautherot 2010, pp. 63–75, 82–101; for the workers' villages of Núcleo Bandeirante and Sacolândia, a product of 'self-construction', see especially the photos on pp. 88 and 101. Some images are available at: <http://www.ims.com.br/ims/explore/artista/marcel-gautherot/obras>. See also the short film by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, *Brasília, Contradições de uma Cidade Nova*, 23', Filmes do Serro, 1967, in *Joaquim Pedro de Almeida: Obra Completa*, DVD box set, vol. 3, Video Filmes, VFD111; available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKoCf8JsOn8>. Retrieved 3 November 2016. See also, on the acute contradiction between the purity of the forms and the brutality of the working conditions in the building sites of Brasília, the recent video work by Clara Ianni, *Forma-livre* [Free Form], video, b&w, 7'14', 2013 (with English subtitles), available at: <https://vimeo.com/88459179>.

29 For Niemeyer's recognition of the 'impracticability' of providing housing for the workers in the *Plano Piloto*, see Niemeyer, cited in Gautherot 2010, p. 18.

## Utopia and Malaise

Was this an *ancien régime* renewed by 'transformism' operations in the Gramscian sense? As a matter of fact, the contradictory formula of Brasília's conception is not far from the Bonapartist solution to the political and socioeconomic crises. A note written by Mário Pedrosa in 1957 records an observation made at the beginning of Brasília's construction:

In spite of his creative imagination ... Lúcio Costa tends to yield to anachronisms ... Lúcio's plan envisions the city's monumental axis above the municipal sector, beyond the automobile parking lots following one beltway and the barracks following the other. What barracks are these? According to him, they are really army troop barracks ... First, one asks oneself: Why these barracks within the city? Second, what are the specific functions of these troops when the new capital ... is sheltered from sudden enemy landing and can only be reached by air? There is no military justification for detaching land troops ... unless these troops were not meant for defense against external enemies, but, at certain moments deemed opportune, for driving their tanks,<sup>30</sup> in the way we know all too well, through the city's central axis, in order to affect the inhabitants themselves and weigh ... upon the deliberations of one or more of the powers of the Republic. But why change, then? Why Brasília? Why dream of utopias?<sup>31</sup>

The absence of workers' houses and Pedrosa's observation allow one to discern a mythological constant: a modern version of the non-urban and symbiotic society, free (sic) from class struggle. That is, the majestic mercantile-baroque city restricted to the court, in line with the complexes of El Escorial (1563–84) and Versailles (1678–82).<sup>32</sup> Such is the utopia, according to Bonapartism – for which the Armed Forces had been trained – of Luso-tropical colonial absolutism, whose fundamental sentiment is that of a malaise in history.

30 The word is written in English in the original.

31 Pedrosa 1998c, pp. 400–1; English translation: Pedrosa 2015c, p. 352.

32 For an acute reading of baroque architecture and urbanism, characterised by the logic of social fracture and class segregation, as opposed to the unitarianism of Gothic cities, see Romero 2009, pp. 151–78. See also Rama 1998. For an indication of the transfiguring suppression of Brasília's workers in abstract shapes, see Gautherot's photographs of Bruno Giorgi's sculpture, called *Os Candangos* (1960), in which the shapes of the arms and shoulders reproduce the colonnade of the Alvorada palace. Gautherot 2010, pp. 78–81.

## Nostalgia and (Family) Romance

In culturalist terms, malaise in history could be interpreted as a legacy of the entrenched Catholicism of the bourgeoisie of Iberian origin. However, on the historical level, and in concrete terms, such malaise expresses a nostalgia of the empire-form in which the Iberian mercantile bourgeoisies, at the origin of colonial bourgeoisies, experienced their great expansion in concert with the aristocracies.<sup>33</sup> Absolutism is their primal and permanent political culture – a reason, among others, for Trotsky to affirm that democratic revolutions in peripheral societies would never come from the local bourgeoisies.<sup>34</sup> Neo-primitivism is their ‘primal scene’ or ‘family romance’ (in Freud’s parlance),<sup>35</sup> whenever such peripheral bourgeoisies wish to disguise themselves as autonomous and autochthonous entities so as to conceal their servitude to the bourgeoisies of the central economies.

Therefore, malaise in history merges with a mythological complex, which decisively contributes to the removal of the political process of national decision-making from its proper place, namely, the urban environment. Functionalist architecture, as evidenced by the *Athens* (sic) *Charter*<sup>36</sup> (what a historic irony! Or perhaps a farce), does not include agorae or political activities, but only functional or reproductive activities, according to their congenital Taylorism. In Brazil – once hybridised by the neo-primitivism of the *Pau-Brasil* and Cannibalist manifestoes, originated from the Modern Art Week of 1922 – Corbusier’s functionalist architecture was functionalised as allegory. As such, it was a result of a consortium between the artistic avant-garde and agrarian-commercial capitals, linked to coffee latifundia.<sup>37</sup>

The union of 1922 prefigured and prepared that of 1937, between modern Brazilian architecture and the Bonapartism of Vargas’s *Estado Novo*, which suc-

33 See Romero 2009.

34 See Trotsky 2009a, pp. 62–4.

35 Elisabeth Roudinesco and Michel Plon define the notion of ‘family romance’ (*Familienroman*) as an ‘expression created ... to designate the way a subject modifies their genealogical ties by inventing for him or herself, through an account or fantasy, a different family that is not his or her own’. The notion was used for the first time by Freud in an article for Otto Rank’s book, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909, Vienna); it was later used in other works such as *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (1910, Vienna), *Totem and Taboo* (1912–13, Vienna), and in his last, *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays* (1939, Amsterdam). See Roudinesco and Plon 1998, pp. 668–9.

36 iv International Congress for Modern Architecture, Athens, 1933.

37 On this consortium and the central role of Paulo Prado, the great patron of the modernists, see M. Andrade 1943b, pp. 225–8.

cessively engendered the great works that brought international recognition to Brazilian architecture and consolidated its system:<sup>38</sup> the building of the Ministry of Education and Health (MES), the Brazilian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, the Pampulha ensemble, and, finally, Brasília.

In short, invigorated in its Bonapartist aspect, already present in Corbusier's programme, Brazil's modern state architecture corroborated the confiscation of politics, confined to palaces and monopolised by restricted groups, regional or sectoral. Such groups alternate in power,<sup>39</sup> always in consonance, beyond contingent differences, with the absolutist project – first elaborated during the colonial regime – of constituting not a social formation, but a productive unit.<sup>40</sup> Such a historic programme unifies, in Brazil, all sectors of the bourgeoisie – the agrarian, commercial, industrial, financial and the new class originated from 'Lulism'<sup>41</sup> – against workers and populations enslaved and expropriated of their ancestral rights to land and other goods. Thus, historian Caio Prado Júnior, in *The Colonial Background of Modern Brazil* [*Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, 1942], a precursory work in 'decolonisation' studies, affirmed that colonial Portuguese America was formed exclusively to supply goods to the European market.<sup>42</sup>

38 For the notion of the formation of a system of Brazilian modern architecture, see Recamán, 'A Formação da Arquitetura Moderna Brasileira', in Recamán 2002, pp. 90–181; Recamán 2004, p. 114.

39 'In a speech at the Constituent Assembly of 1891, Tomás Delfino affirmed that the aspirations of the State and the national will could not reach the Legislative and Executive Powers imprisoned in a great city, if such aspirations once faced the formidable barrier of crowds on which an instant of passion causes tumult'. See Pinheiro 1957, cited in Costa 2002, p. 15. For the persistence of the *anti-urban* design in current government housing policies, see P.F. Arantes and Fix 2009. For the persistence of an *anti-political* dimension (which we can now regard as the second face of *anti-urban* design), in the theory of underdevelopment, by Celso Furtado, see Oliveira 2003b, p. 18. With regard to such theory, which is certainly innovative in other respects, Francisco de Oliveira affirms: 'strictly speaking, *politics* in the theory of underdevelopment is an epiphenomenon'.

40 See Prado Jr. 2000, p. 20; English translation: Prado Jr. 1967, p. 21.

41 On the formation of a 'new class', constituted by leaders from labour syndicalism 'transformed into financial fund operators', in the Lula administration (2003–10), see Oliveira 2003a, pp. 145–9; English translation: Oliveira 2003c, pp. 53–7.

42 'If we look for the vital element in Brazil's formation, the element that lies at the very roots of its subsequent growth, we will find it in the fact that the colony was established to provide sugar, tobacco, and certain other commodities; later gold and diamonds; then cotton; and later still coffee for the European market. [Nothing else, but this]'. (The last

Building a productive unit, with no other organisation than the administration necessary for the reproduction and updating of the productive forms – such is the utopia of Portuguese slave-based colonial mercantilist absolutism, revived and updated by Brazilian Bonapartism, through the introduction of forms of abstract labour, or, more recently, by increasingly flexible labour relationships, according to the current doctrine.

### Order and Progress

Let us conclude the reading of the social substrate and of the modernist genes of Brasília's visual forms. Besides the presidential palaces that follow the image of the *casas-grandes*, and also the ministerial palaces – glass boxes that simulate transparency, as they are located in a void, away from the eyes of the Nation and flanked by useless columns – in fact, false columns that in practice function as mere ornaments hanging from the main structure whose primary purpose is to stylise nationality through evocations of popular forms – such as palafittes (of the Itamaraty Palace) – or of nature's forms – such as waterfalls and tropical vegetation (of the Palace of Justice) – and serialised vegetation (another sign inherited from Tarsila) reminiscent of the large latifundia plantations; besides the Bonapartist device of uniformed gunmen permanently quartered around the seat of power, and the obediently profiled ministry buildings (at the Esplanade of the Ministries) – like the dwellings of the Indians in Jesuit-run missionary productive centres – what does the colonnade of the National Congress building hold in store for us?

Under the large bowls housing the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, and which evoke – for once, in contrast to so many manorial reminders – the frugality of common people's austere everyday utensils – one spots the aspects of simplicity, sobriety and uniformity of the Congress colonnade. They are the components of a large surrounding that holds together the Square of Three Powers, the presidential palace and the Supreme Court palace. Such complex, always combining agro-colonial references, gives to the whole the imposing air of a rural seat, typical of a large landholding. In such context, what is the specific symbolic function of the very simple and austere Congress colonnade? Before following the straight lesson of functionalist precepts, the colonnade

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sentence, in brackets, was omitted in the English translation from 1967. I reintroduced it, according to the Brazilian edition, LRM). See Prado Jr. 2000, p. 20; English translation: Prado Jr. 1967, p. 21.

also carries features of the frontal mainstays that supported the *senzalas*'s [slave quarters'] sheds ...<sup>43</sup>

As the capital of a country newly industrialised on the basis of inequality and semi-colonial social structures,<sup>44</sup> Brasília's function was to establish a zone free (sic) from class struggle, according to Philip II's already geometrised standard of El Escorial (1586), conceived as a majestic citadel and imperial capital. Brasília was created to eliminate conflicts, that is, to be a city *without politics*. In this way, it is somewhat similar to its apparent opposite without any trace of urban design, São Paulo, a chaotic megalopolis, whose urban expansion process was also achieved according to such historical design. Both cities, beyond their apparent oppositions, reflect the sinister motto of productive maximisation, 'Order and Progress', inscribed on the national flag during the first military, positivist and anti-political consulate.

Brasília, São Paulo and the flag mirror the funereal *utopia-without-politics*, formerly a Lusitanian colonial mercantile utopia, later a positivist utopia, and today a utopia of the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), a congenital utopia of capitalism which consists in denying all social formation, to constitute only a production complex.

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43 For images of the colonnades of slave quarters, see the *senzalas* [slave quarters] of the Jurissaca mill and the Mata mill, both in Cabo de Santo Agostinho, Pernambuco; of the Tinoco mill, in Rio Formoso, Pernambuco, and the slave quarters of the Coimbras mill, *idem*, see G. Gomes 1998, pp. 43–7.

44 On 'semi-colonial' structures, see Trotsky 2009a, pp. 62–4.

## All This Geometry, Where Does It Come from, Where Does It Go?

### Task

At the beginning of 2004, the team of curators of São Paulo's Pinacoteca do Estado [State Pinacotheca] invited me to initiate a cycle of conferences, each dedicated to one piece from its collection. They proposed to me a small painting, strict and synthetic as a study, of undeniable historical value as a document from a past era: a work by Luiz Sacilotto, *Vibração Ondular* [*Wavy Vibration*, 1953]<sup>1</sup> – coincidentally, made in the year I was born. More than an invitation to discuss a single painting on a Saturday afternoon in September some months ahead, this assignment soon appeared to me – when I started measuring its consequences – as a call or a commission for a long and demanding historical study. Should I accept it? It became a serious issue.

### Diagnosis: No Future

At that time, Francisco (Chico) de Oliveira had just released his essay 'O Ornit-orrinco' ['The Duckbilled Platypus', 2003].<sup>2</sup> In the debates and roundtables then – with the author together with Roberto Schwarz and Paulo Arantes – the dominant idea was that the future of the country had been amputated and its days were numbered.<sup>3</sup> The leap forward of globalised capitalism had cannibalised all projects of national modernisation. The ideas of nation and its formation – as well as the struggle against *underdevelopment* – which had decisively informed and permeated the Brazilian culture for many decades – now seemed unreachable goals.

The vision of *Wavy Vibration* constituted an interpellation. In the age of dismantling, its discrete black-and-white simplicity, with evenly distributed

1 See the first image in the Sacilotto's website's slideshow: <http://www.sacilotto.com.br/pinturas/>, also available at <http://pinacoteca.org.br/acervo/obras/>.

2 Oliveira 2003a; English translation: Oliveira 2003c.

3 See Schwarz 2003a, pp. 11–23; English translation: Schwarz 2003b, pp. 31–9. See also Schwarz 1999f; P. Arantes 2004; and texts from Part 5, about Brazil, in P. Arantes 2007c, pp. 245–92.



lines, immediately caused a strangeness which soon gave way to the question: *all this geometry, where does it come from, where does it go?* Where did all this need for a geometrised language come from? After all, what had happened and seized the visual arts in Brazil between 1950 and 1964? Or, to say it in terms of the wider and concrete historical scale, between the return of Getúlio Vargas to power and the coup of 1964?

In fact, I had been caught – and in an unavoidable way, due to the strange and familiar form – somewhere between the severe and the revealing. In short, I was facing the appeal of the uncanny or *unheimlich*, as Freud said. In effect, the challenge led me to this series of texts.

### A Common Field

But how to proceed? The most laconic kind of pictorial economy sounded like an allegory of a remote country that was supposedly moving forward towards the future. ‘Waves’ coming and going – it did not take much for me to come to the ideas of ‘formation of a system’ and of a ‘feeling of opposites’, as Antonio Candido used to say.

One need only think a little about the modernist movement of 1922. Programmatic unity and common conversations occurred mainly among writers. Or at most, special dialogues were established between painter Tarsila do Amaral and writer Oswald de Andrade; painter Anita Malfatti and writer Mário de Andrade.

Among the painters, on the other hand, just a glimpse of their works is enough to notice: Tarsila to one side, Anita to another; Di Cavalcanti to yet another one. They turned their backs on each other. Looking into the next few decades, one sees something similar. Modernist painters, in their subsequent careers, seem to have detached themselves from their own works. They surrendered to different means and paths. They entered the erratic march of eclecticism and ‘volubility’ of ideas<sup>4</sup> – in short, the notorious march of disparate changes, so characteristic of processes emptied of ‘internal causality’.<sup>5</sup> This

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4 For the notion of *volubility* as an aesthetic characteristic linked to the Brazilian social structure, see Schwarz 1990; English translation: Schwarz 2001. See also Schwarz 1999h, pp. 220–6.

5 ‘A fundamental stage in overcoming dependency is the capacity to produce works of the first order, influenced by previous national examples, not by immediate foreign models. This signifies the establishment of what could be called, a little mechanically, an internal causality,

was nothing new, of course, but consequences of the colonial past and of an unreflecting peripheral condition.

On the other hand, the novelty of what occurred in the period from 1950 to pre-1964 is striking. One need only recount and compare the threads that later came to compose such will to geometry. First, a few rare and sparse threads, dating from the late 1940s, and then the thick and resilient fabric that came to compose it in the following years. A fabric so resistant that it could even endure a division like that which split into two rival camps, in June 1957, Concrete Art and Neo-Concrete Art, which emerged from the break. One may infer from this, despite the division, the constitution of a common field of language. A process was crystallised which, in terms of occupation and duration, carried with it unprecedented dimensions in the history of Brazilian culture. It is not necessary to highlight this difference, which is clear. But it is necessary to think its complexity and unfolding, which has yet to be done.

In summary, never before have artistic changes of a visual order taken place on such a scale and degree in Brazil: that is, with the dispute around some of the common principles and objectives, to the point where their conflicting dynamics come to constitute a dense whole of interconnected questions: *the field of the geometric tendencies* of Brazilian art.

### Mestizo Geometries

Besides the main programmatic currents – Concrete and Neo-Concrete Art – in such a territory there circulated many singular artistic experiments which also resorted to geometry in many diverse ways. Thus, several artists working at the margins – whose research was not included in the major programmes – can be aligned, if only for the purposes of this distinction, with the syncretic trend: Volpi, Flexor, Maria Leontina, Milton Dacosta, etc.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, I suppose that, when the prospect of the dialectical organicity of the field in question is deepened, even the pro-expressionist artists of the period, like Oswaldo Goeldi, might show signs of a dialogue in situ with geometric trends. I think that the structural elements of the language of late Goeldi belong to this dynamic starting from the mid-1940s: thus, not only the geomet-

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which makes the borrowings from other cultures more fruitful'. See Candido 1989b, p. 153; English translation: Candido 2014b, pp. 119–41.

6 See Duarte 1998a, pp. 183–221.

rised outlines of the buildings, strongly present in the images, but also the spatiality and the strokes that engender it, carry a geometric spirit, through cuts that act as economic forms or structuring syntheses in his scenes.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Goeldi's geometrised proposition of spatiality founds and precedes the definition of the affective and subjective materials, characteristic of the expressionist tradition. Geometrised space gives the scene a degree of objectivity that is quite different from the fundamentally subjective ambience, which is that of the expressionist materials in their original version from Northern Europe.

Similarly, Iberê Camargo's preference for the shape of reels in the late 1950s borrows, albeit unavowedly, from the intelligence of the modular and serial schemes of Concretism and Neo-Concretism. As well as later, the explosion of the 'reel-form', seen in Camargo's work in the mid-1960s, suggests an attunement with the overcoming of the formal schemes of Neo-Concretism in the poetics of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica.

Even in the representative of the field of Art Brut in that period, Arthur Amora – an intern of the psychiatric clinic of Engenho de Dentro – there is a striking presence of geometry.<sup>8</sup> In short, this means that the most remarkable examples of Brazilian art from the period, even in the denial – *et pour cause* – are all mestizos of geometry. Thus, the predominance of the geometric art paradigm goes so far as to hybridise artistic researches whose foundations were in principle antithetical to it.

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7 See, for example, images of Oswaldo Goeldi, *The Thief* (*O Ladrão*, 1955), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra32915/o-ladrao>; idem, *Slum* (*Favela*, undated), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra57998/favela>; idem, *Damned House* (*Casa Maldita*, c. 1955), at: [http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras\\_interior&opcao=F&pagina=221&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=221](http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras_interior&opcao=F&pagina=221&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=221); idem, *Silence* (*Silêncio*, c. 1957), at: [http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras\\_interior&opcao=F&pagina=493&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=493](http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras_interior&opcao=F&pagina=493&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=493); idem, *Nocturne* (*Noturno*, c. 1950, 19.5 × 27 cm), at: [http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras\\_interior&opcao=F&pagina=136&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=136](http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras_interior&opcao=F&pagina=136&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=136); idem, *Nocturne* (*Noturno*, c. 1950, 20.8 × 26.9 cm), at: [http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras\\_interior&opcao=F&pagina=138&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=138](http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras_interior&opcao=F&pagina=138&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=138); and idem, *Nocturne* (*Noturno*, c. 1950, 20.5 × 27.7 cm), at: [http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras\\_interior&opcao=F&pagina=289&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=289](http://www.centrovirtualgoeldi.com/paginas.aspx?menu=obras_interior&opcao=F&pagina=289&ano=&FirstYear=&LastYear=&iditem=289).

8 See, for instance, paintings produced by Artur Amora, between 1949 and 1953, belonging to the collection of the Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente (Museum of Images of the Unconscious), in Rio de Janeiro, available at: <http://www.ccms.saude.gov.br/cincoartistas/amora.php>.

## Formation

This was how, beyond all the basic schemes and dichotomous categories of European art, there was constituted the *dialectical unity* of the geometric trend in Brazilian art, which achieved hegemonic power from 1950 to 1964. A unity of diversities, in this case, beyond rivalries between groups and attitudes, expressed in the common constitution, after all, of a discursive field in which the works were interrelated. So was developed a dialectical process comprising debates and confrontations, operating as reciprocal determinations.

The terms would certainly change in the post-64 period, with the New Figuration movement, which carried some of the exponents of geometric abstraction away from the fields of both Concrete and Neo-Concrete Art. But for the moment the task is to establish the initial core of the will to geometry. From this core Sacilotto's artistic activity was born and developed, as an activity emblematic of Concrete Art, of its most cherished principles and objectives.

## Exemplary Case

In this sense, Sacilotto's work also serves as a collective parameter and is useful for the assessment, in light of the historical period, of a method and its aspiration. In effect, with the ethical logic, operational rigour and strict austerity of its programmatic goal, such poetics wanted to displace the artisanal and subjective forge of art, subsuming the singularity of the work and of the case to a major aesthetic project. It sought to institute an updated aesthetic truth and to nourish a collective poetic stance. The *Ruptura* manifesto was clear in this regard.<sup>9</sup>

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9 'THE OLD is: all varieties and hybrids of naturalism; the mere negation of naturalism, that is, the "wrong" naturalism of children, of the insane, the "primitive", the expressionists, the surrealists etc.; the hedonistic non-figurativism spawned by gratuitous taste that seeks the mere excitement of pleasure or displeasure. THE NEW is: all expressions based on the new art principles; all experiences that tend to renovation of the essential values of visual art (space-time, movement and matter); the artistic intuition endowed with clear and intelligent principles, and great possibilities of practical development; to give art a defined place within the scope of contemporary spiritual work, while considering it as a means of knowledge deducible from concepts, situating it above opinion and demanding, for its assessment, a previous knowledge'. See Cordeiro et al. 1977 [1952], p. 69.

### From Loose Cases to the System

Aiming at a general overview of the process, a historical parallel should be established. The emergence of the cycle of geometric trends of Brazilian art echoes and duplicates an earlier process: that of the *formation* of a system of Brazilian modern architecture, about 15 to 20 years earlier.<sup>10</sup>

Based on testimonies and comments of Lúcio Costa, Otília Arantes established some of the decisive factors and milestones of this process.<sup>11</sup> Thus, she emphasised the formation of the system, in contrast to the occurrence of loose or 'unpartnered' cases, as Lúcio Costa put it.<sup>12</sup> The decisive landmark in this perspective was the official commission for the architectural project of the new headquarters of the Ministry of Education and Public Health in 1937.

Thus, the structuring process of a *system* was outlined. Composed of authors, works and a public, united by reciprocal relations, it was consistent enough to engender parameters and elements transmissible from one experiment or work to another. Such structuring would stimulate a continuity or a fabric of intertwined historical experiences, which later experiences may consult and develop.

### Genesis and Criteria of the Idea of Formation

The concept of a *formation* of an artistic-cultural national *system* was established by Antonio Candido according to literary parameters, in *Formação da Literatura Brasileira – Momentos Decisivos 1750–1880* [*Formation of Brazilian Literature – Decisive Moments 1750–1880*].<sup>13</sup> The original idea of *formation*, in turn, had been developed earlier. It can be found in the work of several authors who started to write about it in the wake of the changes brought about by the so-called 'Revolution of 1930': Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 2, in this volume.

<sup>11</sup> In 'Esquema de Lúcio Costa', Otília Arantes combines elements of the account and the thread of Lúcio Costa's ideas with Antonio Candido's scheme, through which the latter pointed out the emergence of a literary system in Brazil, which operated at the time as a kind of centre for debates in the country. See O. Arantes 2004. For the resumption of the same perspective around the issue of *formation* in other essays by the author, see also O. and P. Arantes 1998.

<sup>12</sup> L. Costa 2003, *apud* O. Arantes 2004, pp. 84–103.

<sup>13</sup> For the original notions of *formation* and *system*, in the accepted meaning mentioned above, see Candido 2006c, pp. 17–22; and 2002, pp. 93–120.

Caio Prado Jr.<sup>14</sup> Before them, in 1931, Mário de Andrade had been the first to raise the question and highlight the importance of the objective of *formation* in Brazil. Some generations earlier, Silvio Romero (the pre-modernist critic who died in 1914 and who Candido had studied) had noted the lack of continuity of ideas as a Brazilian issue. This delineated the problem that the idea of *formation* sought to address.<sup>15</sup>

In architecture, the factors that had a combined influence were: a major historical process; the reformist Revolution of 1930 and its political and cultural developments;<sup>16</sup> and the 'external influx' or seminal fact, embodied by Le Corbusier's visit to Brazil.

In the case of painting, it is well known that from the early 1950s onwards, the progressive consolidation of a *habitat* for abstract and geometric art was visible in Brazil, as had previously been the case in Argentina.<sup>17</sup> Then came the constitution of so-called Concrete Art.<sup>18</sup>

### Totem and the Habitat

As in the case of the *formation* scheme of modern architecture in Brazil, two factors, a larger historical process and an external fact with a totemic function, combined to bring about the propagation of the new gospel of Concrete Art in the artistic circles of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

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14 See Candido 1969, pp. xi–xxii.

15 'Our national formation is not natural, spontaneous, or logical, so to speak'. See M. Andrade 1943a, p. 8, *apud* P. Arantes 1998, p. 18. On the 'discovery of the lack', by Silvio Romero, see P. Arantes 1998, p. 15. On the debate's evolution and unfoldings, through the ideas of 'traditionalising' the new and the idea of *formation* as decolonisation, see Schwarz 1999d, p. 48 et seq.

16 On the Revolution of 1930 and its consequences, see Candido 2006f, pp. 219–40.

17 For the precedence and characteristics of similar phenomena, the emergence of geometric trends in South America, also called 'constructive' (sic), see Amaral 1993, pp. 86–99. For a discussion of such designations, see below.

18 In 1947, the poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade published in number 9 of the *Joaquim* journal, from Curitiba, the article '*Invencionismo*' on Argentine concrete painters (I owe this reference to Aracy Amaral). Between 1948 and 1949, Mário Pedrosa wrote his thesis on *Gestalt: Da Natureza Afetiva da Obra de Arte* [*Gestalt: Of the Affective Nature of the Artwork*, presented in 1949]. At the same time, some artists, almost always individually, began to experiment with geometric forms: Mary Vieira, Franz Weissmann, Luiz Sacilotto, Abraham Palatnik, Almir Mavignier, Geraldo de Barros, Waldemar Cordeiro (then in Italy), etc. For Pedrosa's thesis, see Pedrosa 1996, pp. 105–230. See also O. Arantes 2005b, p. 55.

The major historical factor, responsible for the *habitat*, manifested itself, among other signs, by the founding of the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), in 1947, and the two Museums of Modern Art (MAM), in São Paulo, in 1948, and in Rio, in 1949. Similarly, the series of São Paulo Art Biennials began in 1951.<sup>19</sup>

All these institutions depended on private patronage: to stay with the case of São Paulo, which took the lead, in the case of the Biennial and the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM-SP), the industrialist F. Matarazzo Sobrinho; and, in the case of the Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP), the owner of a media conglomerate Assis Chateaubriand. So it was in fact from the large *habitat* created by the capitalist expansion of industrial production, services, international trade of manufactures and commodities, that Concrete Art, like similar formations in South America, nurtured itself.

Such efflorescence of geometry in the field of visual discourses was contemporaneous not only with the expansion of manufacturing production and international trade and the founding of new museums, but also with the construction of new multilateral institutions to regulate the international economy: the World Bank (1945), the International Monetary Fund (1945) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC, 1948, known in Latin America as CEPAL). They all share an ideology of Weberian rationality. Thus, in various ways, geometric languages gravitated symbolically toward the developmentalist programmes of some peripheral countries that were optimistic and had great expectations in the premiss of rationality in trade and finance, supposedly present in the new international order.

### **Totem-Function: Naturalise External Genealogies**

On a larger scale, to the establishment of a *habitat* for geometric languages – consistent with the adoption of instances and standards of regulation on an international scale – another external factor was added. It was exercised, in this case, by the arrival of Swiss artist and architect Max Bill for a retrospective exhibition at the São Paulo Art Museum (MASP) in 1950. As with the series of effects triggered in the field of architecture by Le Corbusier's visit to Brazil in 1937, the impact of Max Bill on Brazilian visual arts has since translated into the totemic role he assumed.

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19 See Pedrosa 1986; Pedrosa 1995b, pp. 216–84; English translation (extracts): Pedrosa 2015i, pp. 153–68. See also Alambert and Canhête 2004.

At that time, Bill was the main articulator of the Ulm School, expressly founded as a substitute for the Bauhaus. The Swiss architect and designer, himself a student of the Bauhaus in Dessau in 1927–8, drew together a group of young people who were interested or already initiated in geometric languages and design, and connected them to the activities developed in Ulm. Analogously, in 1955 he would also bring over the Argentine graphic artist Tomás Maldonado.

In short, two laws were combined in this event: the intervention of an external agent – soon totemised – in conjunction with the law of dual or compensatory oscillation between localism and cosmopolitanism.<sup>20</sup> Thus, one can summarily schematise the processes that have occurred, in relation to both Le Corbusier and Max Bill. The foreign author, enjoying the aura provided by a set of achievements abroad, proposes a new paradigm and brings greater perspectives with it. In addition, he offers the possibility of a union between a local group and metropolitan institutions. This results in an opportunity for internationalisation and for leaving the provincial condition; in short, a chance for greater recognition, which is highly valued in dependent or semi-colonial peripheral cultures. Such processes are historically repeated through the renewal of the totemic cycles that, in turn, structure and reproduce relations of dependency.

### When Geometry Proliferated

Soon came the 1st São Paulo Art Biennial (20 October–23 December 1951). Besides Max Bill, the biennial acknowledged some of the local young initiates in the virtues of geometry: Antonio Maluf, Ivan Serpa, Almir Mavignier and Abraham Palatnik. Other events soon thereafter exalted the same values: the 1st National Exhibition of Abstract Art opened on 20 February 1952 at the Hotel

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20 'If it were possible to establish a law of evolution of our spiritual life, we could perhaps say that all of it is governed by the dialectic of localism and cosmopolitanism, manifested through the most diverse ways. Now the premeditated and at times violent affirmation of literary nationalism, with the aim of creating even a different language; now the declared conformism, the conscious imitation of European standards. ... This process can be called dialectic because it has really consisted of a progressive integration of the literary and spiritual experience, through the tension between the local fact (which presents itself as substance of expression) and the moulds inherited from European tradition (which present themselves as a form of the expression)' (Candido 2006e, p. 117).



Quitandinha, in Petrópolis, and the founding manifesto of the Ruptura group and its first exhibition in December 1952 at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM-SP).

In Rio de Janeiro, the newly founded group Frente opened its first exhibition in the gallery of the Cultural Institute Brazil-United States (ICBEU, starting 30 June 1954). The First National Exhibition of Concrete Art in December 1956, at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM-SP), in São Paulo (4–18 December 1956) was the corollary of the efforts of São Paulo and Rio artists, united in favour of geometric art. Then, in January and February 1957, came the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ, whose temporary headquarters were located in the Ministry of Education and Health).

Finally, in June 1957, came the split between the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro regional families. It involved differences in practices and perspectives. Art critic and poet Ferreira Gullar, who would later play a key role in the constitution of the Neo-Concrete movement, orchestrated the split in Rio, on one side, while Concrete poets of São Paulo did so on the other.<sup>21</sup> This crisis gave rise to the First Exhibition of Neo-Concrete Art – opened on 22 March 1959, at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ) – and the concomitant publication of the ‘Neo-Concrete Manifesto’, in the Sunday Supplement of the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*.<sup>22</sup> Thus, rather than being a sign of weakness, a crisis and a split generated exhibitions and manifestos, signalling vigour and opening up new fronts of production.

### *Wavy Vibration: An Exemplary Case*

Having considered the question from a general perspective, let us now specify it on the molecular scale of the bi-chromatic painting *Vibração Ondular* [*Wavy Vibration*]. In fact, the commission of this study occurred because of such painting. The curvilinear construction formed by a regular succession of rods or blank modular segments on a black background, far from being the result

21 The division into groups was sealed with the publication of two texts. In Rio de Janeiro: ‘Poesia concreta: uma experiência intuitiva’ [Concrete poetry: an intuitive experience], by Reynaldo Jardim, Ferreira Gullar and Oliveira Bastos. In São Paulo: ‘Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição’ [From the phenomenology of composition to the mathematics of composition], by Haroldo de Campos. See Amaral 1998b, p. 294.

22 The manifesto was published in the Sunday supplement (SDJB) of *Jornal do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 21–2 March 1959, signed by: Amílcar de Castro, Ferreira Gullar, Franz Weissmann, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Reynaldo Jardim and Theon Spanudis. See Amaral 1977, pp. 80–4.

of a random gesture or of mimetic intention, composes the rigorous graphic scheme of the mechanical development of an undulating dynamic. Since it is not an act of *mimesis*, would it be the project of a mechanism or the diagram of its functioning? In this sense, if we attribute to it the function of a project or floor plan, it could well allude to a conveyor belt or to the partial schematic representation of two cogs spinning in opposite directions.

But it is not the case of assigning a function to the curve, since, as a pictorial object, the painting is intended for contemplation. In this sense, its primary meaning is indissociable from the affirmation of a visual programme of clarity and order. Besides, given that the structure of the two sections of the curve – although the one on the left goes up and the one on the right goes down – are essentially the same, albeit opposed, it can be deduced, in addition to the opposite directions, that the construction implies values of symmetry, equability and equitable developments, even if with distinct or opposing senses. So, in a way, it also suggests freedom.

Are these qualities peculiar to such a specific work? Quite to the contrary, when looking at other works of Sacilotto, from 1952 and 1953, as well as works by other artists who constituted with him the movement of Concrete Art, one sees that *Wavy Vibration* can be taken as a precursor and exemplar of what would become the programme of Concrete Art.

In the constancy of the purposes and procedures, and in the homogeneity of the results achieved in his works,<sup>23</sup> two recurrent aspects afford the following inferences: 1) the permanent affirmation of the supremacy of the idea over the execution can be verified. That is, the supremacy of the *planned act* over the disorder and unpredictability of the phenomena; 2) the peremptory refusal of any ambivalence or ambiguity in the adopted language is asserted.

Once again, are these by any chance idiosyncrasies or stylistic singularities of Sacilotto? Certainly not. Besides encountering similar attitudes and works by other artists of the Ruptura group, what happens here is the strict application of the principles of the founding manifesto of the group in 1952. And this, in

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23 See, for example, Luiz Sacilotto, *Successive Rhythms* [*Ritmos Sucessivos*, 1952], reproduced in: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra8162/ritmos-sucessivos>. See also idem, *Complementary Articulation* [*Articulação Complementária*, 1952]; idem, *Concretion* [*Concreção*, 1953]; idem, *Structuring with Similar Elements* [*Estruturação com Elementos Iguais*, 1953]; idem, *Similar Parallels with Different Effects* [*Paralelos Iguais com Efeitos Diferentes*, 1953]; idem *Occasional Rectangle* [*Retângulo Eventual*, 1954] – reproduced in: <http://www.sacilotto.com.br/pinturas/?lang=en>, slides 8, 11, 12, 13 and 14, respectively. See also idem, *Concretion 5624* [*Concreção*, 1956], reproduced in: <http://www.sacilotto.com.br/relevos/?lang=en>, slide 2.

turn, strictly meets the precepts expressed in the *Basis of Concrete Art* charter, written in 1930 by Dutch artist Theo Van Doesburg and published in Paris.<sup>24</sup>

This manifesto stipulated six fundamental principles for Concrete Art:

1) Art is universal; 2) the work of art must be entirely conceived and structured by the mind before its execution. It shall not receive anything of nature's or sensuality's or sentimentality's formal data ...; 3) the painting must be entirely built up with purely plastic elements, namely planes and colours. A pictorial element only signifies 'itself', therefore, the painting does not have any meaning other than 'itself'; 4) the construction of a painting, as well as that of its elements, must be simple and visually controllable; 5) the painting technique must be mechanic, that is, exact, anti-impressionistic; 6) striving towards absolute clarity.

The text concluded:

most painters work in the manner of pastry cooks and dressmakers. In contrast, we work with mathematic data (Euclidean or non-Euclidean) and science, that is, with intellectual means. A lot of rubbish was justified through humanism in art. One must use a ruler if one is unable to draw a straight line by hand ... The work of art thus conceived achieves the clarity that will form the basis of a new culture.<sup>25</sup>

Does the Concrete Art of São Paulo, including that of Sacilotto, meet such precepts? In effect, in *Wavy Vibration* there is no tonal value or artifice in terms of colour. The 'colour-thought' is clear and distinct. Thus, in *Wavy Vibration* a dual opposition prevails between white linear forms and a black background, which contrast sharply, even more so because they are painted in enamel. Therefore, they follow the precept of 'clear, simple and visually controllable chromatic relations', as envisioned by the Concrete Art charter.

Analogously, in the context of drawing, there are two similar series of rods or straight segments articulated together. One series, as I said, develops upwards; the other downwards. The disposition in continuity of the two developments

24 The term *Concrete Art* initially emerged in the first issue of the magazine of the same title, edited by Van Doesburg. Van Doesburg had been a companion to Mondrian in the Neo-Plasticist movement and then a teacher at the Bauhaus from 1922 to 1924. See Van Doesburg et al. 1930; English translation: Van Doesburg et al. 1974.

25 See Van Doesburg et al. 1930, pp. 1, 3–4, *apud* Amaral 1977, pp. 42–4. English translation: Van Doesburg et al. 1974, *apud* Baljeu 1974, pp. 180–1.

sums up the wavy figure referred to in the title. The segment or central rod linking the two series corresponds to a section of the main diagonal of the painting. None of the other components of the wave, formed by the regular distribution of the white rods or modular segments, were placed in a casual or irregular way either. Their layout was very likely established through the use of a ruler or similar tool, according to the professed principles. Thus, for the series on the left, the ruler was fixed to the lower left corner, and for the series on the right, to the upper right corner. The regular and equal angles between one modular segment and the next are similarly obtained with the use of a protractor. In sum, equal proportions and numbers, to the right and to the left, establish the similarity of the two curvilinear developments, although they suggest movement in reverse directions.

Therefore, through such terms, the pictorial surface is managed by the *planning* of its limits and divisions or internal orders, according to a law or constant idea. Which idea is that? The rhythmic idea, more graphic than pictorial, of two curves that evoke the paths of clock hands, distinct quadrants and opposite centres, integrating into a third curve. The latter governs the union of both in continuity and symmetry. Thus, from the agreed juxtaposition of two simple curves, a third is born, composite and, as already mentioned, with its apex on the left and its lowest point on the right.

"That's enough!", one of the Concrete artists would say! So, the licit reading field appears established and fixated, in these terms, according to the original design of the painting. In such terms, it was revealed how the picture and its laws were conceived. This is what one obtains as a synthesis and corollary of the mode of contemplation proposed by the work.

In effect, within the limits of the Concrete poetics one need not extrapolate the data presented, to speculate on meanings – which would entail surpassing the universe of the painting and – unduly – attributing a semantic content to the graphic and chromatic components mentioned above. After all, according to the founding charter,

the picture has no meaning other than 'itself' ... A woman, a tree, a cow, are concrete in nature, but to the state of painting they are abstract, illusory, vague, speculative, while a plane is a plane, a line is a line; nothing less, nothing more.

### Beyond the Form/Idea and Its Commandments

What can be seen beyond the totem and its taboo? It can be deduced, as regards the correlation of forces that govern the aesthetic experience of Concrete Art, that a single principle governs the three instances involved in a unified way: author, work and public. Thus, in this way the unifying principle embraces those distinct positions, controlling them through the poetic structure, which is established as a visual or rhythmic idea. It is the primacy of such an idea or pictorial principle, necessarily clear and distinct – operating in the manner of an aesthetic contract – that makes explicit the direction advocated by the fourth item of the founding charter, ‘Basis of Concrete painting’: ‘the construction of a painting, as well as that of its elements, must be simple and visually controllable.’<sup>26</sup> (I am sorry if I sound repetitive, but when dealing with Concrete Art, how can one avoid being tautological?).

Let us make a foray in another direction – certainly heretical and against the grain of the commandments of Concrete Art. So, shall we now inquire into the historical and social premises and implications of the logical structure and its simplicity, allegedly destined for rational apprehension? It is a problem that is not strictly poetic, but related to the history of ideas. Confronting this question requires discussion, on the historical plane of the nexuses and its presuppositions, of what came to be called the ‘Brazilian constructive project in art’, *one generation later*.

Let us begin by noting that such a late denomination was enshrined by a retrospective exhibition in 1977,<sup>27</sup> whose ideological and historiographic effects, indissociable from a broad and ambitious process of re-reading Brazilian geometric abstraction, have not yet been exhausted.

Certainly, the constructivist lineage’s claim for Brazilian geometric abstraction involves a complex of interconnected questions with long unfoldings, which cannot be addressed here.<sup>28</sup> Let us therefore focus on a crucial and precise comparison, so as to flesh out the alleged constructive roots of Brazilian art.

26 See Van Doesburg et al. 1930, p. 1, *apud* Amaral 1977, p. 42.

27 See Amaral 1977.

28 See Brito 1985. The book, written between May and November 1975, was first published only in 1985, by the National Arts Foundation (Fundação Nacional de Artes (FUNARTE)) of the Ministry of Culture. The book, however, circulated, from 1975 onwards and passed from hand to hand in the art circles of the Rio-São Paulo region and played a key role in the conception of the 1977 retrospective at Pinacoteca – see Brito 1977, pp. 303–10. It was reissued (and translated into English) in 1999: see Brito 1999a and 1999b.

The hypothesis I am going to defend is that such a denomination will only suffice if it is regarded not in relation to the original Soviet Constructivism, but rather in conjunction with its Western upshots. Incidentally, Benjamin Buchloh, with acute and mordant precision, dubbed the latter ‘Cold War Constructivism’.<sup>29</sup>

Let us explore the context and assumptions of the original Constructivism – which I will call ‘red’ for simplicity’s sake, in opposition to the ‘white’ version or ‘Western Constructivism’. The contrast will be useful in clarifying the original ties of the Brazilian family, in fact, as we have seen in the case of Concrete Art, derived from the migration of white constructivism, current in Paris in the 1930s, to Brazil.

### Red Constructivism

The original red Constructivism – about which Mayakovsky affirmed: ‘for the first time a new term in the field of art – Constructivism – came from Russia and not from France’<sup>30</sup> – manifested itself at first mainly in painting. But it soon asserted and developed itself through interdisciplinarity. In the Soviet case, the principle which governed the migrations of language from one field to another was politics; precisely, the urgency of the revolutionary goals of politicisation and agitation for the deepening of the October Revolution. Thus, many of the first constructivist projects were born at the height of the civil war against the ‘whites’ and aimed at general mobilisation for the defence of the revolutionary government; later, they were associated with the demands for radicalisation of the revolutionary process.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the overcoming of all subjective spontaneity, the redistribution of any trace of personal expressiveness, in red Constructivism, occurred in the sense of the conjugation with politics and in favour of a form of *major collective subjectivity*, which belonged to the revolutionary political subject – whose ultimate goal was the ‘reconstruction of daily life’ [*perestroika byta*].<sup>32</sup>

The conception of the Constructivist work, therefore, far from being immune to the circumstances and impervious to the process of realisation, was

29 On the differences between original and ‘Western Constructivism’, see Buchloh 1992, pp. 85–112.

30 See Maiakovsky 1923, *apud* Albera 1990, p. 118; Albera 2002, p. 165.

31 See Martins 2017f, pp. 194–212.

32 On the notion of *perestroika byta*, see Kopp 1990, pp. 76–86. See also Albera 1990, pp. 76–86; Albera 2002, pp. 237–9.

*structurally open to the situation and aims of the political subject* of the process: the revolutionary workers' movement, to which the tenor of *collective subjectivity* was attributed. According to the permeable and processual character of the work – in which the notion of form did not govern, but subjected itself to the materiality of the construction process – red Constructivist works presented themselves in terms structurally derived from the materials they employed. Thus was engendered, at the aesthetic level, the Constructivist *criticism of the 'unity of form'*, crystallised in the affirmation of form as a 'product of the materials' dynamic strength', according to Tatlin's formula of the culture of materials.

### White Constructivism

On the other hand, from the perspective of the Ruptura and Concrete Art currents, affiliated to white Constructivism, simplicity and logical evidence were affirmed through the hegemony, in each work, of the form/idea totem, celebrated in the original Doesburg manifesto. Thus, instead of the expressiveness of a political subject – according to red Constructivism – what was present in the Brazilian and Latin American cases in general, and also in that of white Constructivism as practised by the Bauhaus, was the symbolic face of the Weberian standard, supposedly universal and a-historical. However, as we shall see, this was only the theoretical mask hiding the empirical feature of *post-artisanal rationality*, derived from the impersonal production of goods in various fields.

In simple terms, the imperviousness to the subjective factors sought by Concrete Art relied on mathematical constructs, and shielded itself under 'rule and compass' and, moreover, against accidents of execution and unexpected traces of spontaneity. However, the Brazilian will to abstraction, in its operational practice, intersected or coincided – as occurs in relation to any design for a product or building, also based on calculations – with operational procedures carried out in the production of goods. Moreover, in such sharing, the local version of white Constructivism did not separate its fate from the amphibian one outlined by the Bauhaus masters.<sup>33</sup> They oscillated between the sphere of pure contemplation and productive calculations for market objects. In São Paulo, the exchange was more than notorious, even heralded, because many artists of the Ruptura and Concrete Art groups also worked professionally as technicians,

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33 For the red constructivist/productivist author Nikolay Tarabukin's criticism of the paradigm of the artist-technician of the Bauhaus, indifferent to the issue of social division of labour, see Martins 2017f, p. 210.

freelancers, small entrepreneurs, etc., in the graphic arts, landscaping, design, furniture, advertising, etc., and disregarded the useless 'fine arts'.

In this way, the notion of subjectivity implied therein only by convenience and a desire for philosophical ballast, claimed to descend from the idealist typology totem. Accordingly, the behavioural and decision-making motivation of such subjectivity would supposedly be, after Max Weber, strictly rational.<sup>34</sup> In everyday reality, such concrete artistic subjectivities exercised *legal* or abstract personality, according to the standards of every market transaction, and had business addresses.

In this sense, Pedrosa said of Waldemar Cordeiro's paintings displayed in the First National Concrete Art Exhibition (1956/7): 'Cordeiro nourishes his idea and transposes it to the canvas like a designer brings his object over a drawing board'. Pedrosa's metaphor was not fortuitous. It alluded not only to a description of the careful and precise facture of Cordeiro's works, but also to his professional situation. In the same way, it could be applied to Sacilotto who at the time made a living as a designer during the day and painted during his free time at night.<sup>35</sup> It could also be extended to Geraldo de Barros and others.

### Science of 'Good Form'

The intellectual articulation between the supposedly universal matrix of Weberian subjectivity and market activities was ensured by the science of 'good form' or *Gestalt*, able to function both in the domain of the disinterested contemplation of forms and in the design of objects for the market. *Gestalt* – which was doctrinally advocated by Concrete Art as a 'science of perception'<sup>36</sup> – conceived an analytics of form, referred to and founded on empirical axioms and

34 See Castoriadis 1990, pp. 47–86.

35 See Pedrosa 1998d, p. 256; English translation: 2015d, p. 275. Sacilotto became a designer in the 1940s after concluding the technical drawing course at Instituto Profissional Masculino do Brás (Brás Professional Institute for Males), where he graduated as a letter draftsman in 1943. Between the 1940s and 1960s, Sacilotto worked as a designer for Hollerith machine factory, at the offices of the architects Jacob Ruchti and Villanova Artigas, among others, and at the Fichet-Aumont factory, where he even designed frames for some of Brasília's buildings (Aracy Amaral provided me with this information). On Cordeiro, see Belluzzo 1986, pp. 15–35; and 1998, pp. 116–20. On Sacilotto, see Belluzzo 1998, pp. 122–8; see also Sacramento 2001.

36 On *Gestalt*, see, among the publications of the time, Gullar 1977, p. 116; Mavignier 1977, p. 177; Pedrosa 1996, pp. 105–230. For historical studies, see Amaral 1998a, p. 58; Belluzzo 1998, pp. 108, 114, 122; Belluzzo 1986, p. 130; O. Arantes 2005a, pp. 51–106.



postulated in connection to individual perceptual-cognitive performance. The construction of this scientific basis for the analytics of form responded to the critical dissolution of the metaphysical unity of form, practised in the so-called 'laboratory phase' of early Russian Constructivism, later unfolded towards the above-mentioned 'culture of materials', and, further ahead, towards Productivism.

### To Modernise Production

In operational circumstances and at the expense of all concreteness and considerations regarding the context and aim of the actions, the procedures of Concrete Art could freely migrate and circulate from one field to another – regardless of differences of materials, production techniques and modes of circulation. The condition was that they maintained the assumptions pure of all concreteness and reaffirmed the goal of 'good form'.

Concretely, this meant that the norms and criteria of 'good form', which circulated indiscriminately between the drawing board, the canvas, the package, the garden, the poster, the poetry page, and so on, always involved operations of splitting up and abstraction, combined with the suppression of aspects of the materiality of the support or medium.<sup>37</sup> No matter how abstract and disinterested the union, in such transit of techniques and practices of perception one always got to an allegorical figure of a modernising and triumphant combination of cost and effort reduction and efficiency benefits.

Thus, the changes proposed by the new Brazilian art, centred around the founding programme of Concrete Art, concentrated exclusively on poetry prescriptions, that is, on the aesthetic-productive mode. In contrast, other relations remained untouched and the functional polarities unchanged. On one side, between author and work, that is, between the artist and his materials, the entrepreneur and his inputs; on the other, the dichotomy between the producer-entrepreneur-artist and the consumer of aesthetic experiences also remained. They all submitted to the totemic power of the form/idea.

In other words, it was a question of modernising the production and optimising the distribution or circulation of products. Thus was implemented a

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37 A testimony by Concrete poet Augusto de Campos confirms the free-transit of good form from one language universe to another: 'I was greatly influenced by painters ... once we started to work with less syntactic or even asyntactic structures, I often faced the problem of arranging the words on a page, of creating, say, reading paths ..., the good form, the pregnant form, many things came from the projects of painters ...'. See Campos 2001, p. 67.

form of modernisation similar to that arising from the introduction of more advanced technologies in industry, agriculture and services, at the same time as the premises of the social and functional division of labour and property relations were preserved. In short, if the productive mode of art was renewed on the one hand, everything remained the same in relation to the division of functions in production and circulation on the other. The latter was always governed in white constructivism according to the ideality of *contemplation*, that is, an ideal stemming from the dual opposition and the correlative specular or projective dynamic between the subject and the fetishised object of contemplation.

### Political Economy of Geometric Abstraction

Of course, none of these criticisms of the premises and implications of the set of values and ideas of Concrete Art contradicts the decisive fact – affirmed at the outset and which is worth reiterating – that the abstract geometric paradigm had become the constitutive vector of an unprecedented process in Brazilian visual arts. The process was that of the *formation* of a modern visual system correlated with the new cycle of modernisations, linked to the expansion of international commerce and intensified by government investments in industrialisation during the second Vargas administration (1951–4).

That said, if the empirical investigation has already revealed the proximity between the prestige of the visual paradigm of geometric abstraction and the regime of capitalist expansion and modernisation, it is worth deepening the investigation. Thus, aiming to determine the social and historical nexuses involved in the hegemony of geometric visual languages, the key questions are: how was the symbolic ascendancy of geometric abstraction translated from the viewpoint of the *historical materiality* of the forces involved in the modernisation process, on the South American scale, and in the larger capitalist expansion ahead of such innovations? Which groups and classes acted as symbolic *subjects* of the general will to geometry? Or, finally, to translate such questions in the terms of the problematic of *formation*, as proposed earlier, which were the implications and consequences of the conversion of the geometric poetic rationality into the *formative* vector of the Brazilian visual system in the period from 1950 to 1964?

## General Rhythm and Aesthetic Synthesis

It is indispensable to reach for a synthetic concept able to effect and condense a simultaneous articulation between the historical process and aesthetic elaborations in order to address such questions. In fact, they require a reflective synthesis that is simultaneous with a complex of heterogeneous spheres, materials and data, which has no easy answer.

Such is the function addressed by Antonio Candido's notion of *objective form*. How does it operate in order to synthesise domains with such a heterogeneous background and tenor? By seeking to assess how a process of aesthetic materialisation takes place. Thus, in the author's own terms, by means of a 'structural reduction' of an 'external social fact' – which is indicative of the 'general rhythm of society' – that is then translated into an aesthetic form.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, the notion of 'objective form', according to Candido, comprises the structural reduction of the 'general rhythm of society', so that the latter, in the specifically aesthetic process of consolidation of its 'objective form', does not appear as an extrinsic modality, but as an active internal element of the literary form, thus imbued with an intrinsic dynamism. Considered as such, the objective form – in the words of Roberto Schwarz – comprises and brings into the aesthetic context a 'practical and historical substance'. The latter when translated into 'objective form' becomes, in other words, an inner power of the novel – since the reflection on the 'general rhythm of society', in this case, arises already in contact with literary forms – or with the visual poetic process, if it is legitimate to transpose this literary notion to the visual domain – as I intend here.

Thus, the question of *formation* of the Brazilian modern visual system may be translated through the critical construct proposed by Candido in new terms as follows: will the 'general rhythm' of South American societies in the period be expressed by the abstract-geometric paradigm as its 'objective form', or not?

The possible answer to this question will also provide the explanatory key to the tenor of the process, and to the historical forces which were able to interrupt the artistic-visual regime of *laissez-faire*. In other words, how did such disruption become possible in cultures so dependent and so characteristically inclined to discontinuities and episodes of eclecticism and volubility like the

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38 On the notion of 'objective form', see Candido 2004a, pp. 28, 38; English translation in Candido 2014a, pp. 79–104. For Schwarz's comments on the subject, see Schwarz 1987a, pp. 129–55, especially p. 142; an English translation of Schwarz on Candido is available: Schwarz 2012. See also Schwarz 1999c, pp. 24–45, especially, pp. 28, 30–1 (for the notion of substance), 35–6, 41.

South Americans? Why were these, in this trance, suddenly stricken by such a will to geometry?

### Figures of Progress

To this end, what did the examination of *Wavy Vibration* and similar subsequent works show us? Let us recall: the reiteration of values of symmetry, equability, equitable and continuous developments, clear, transparent and rational structures, etc.<sup>39</sup>

It is reasonable to associate symmetry with the optimistic assumption of a balanced development, in combination with the other values referred to. In this order of relations, what meaning should we assign to the linear or chromatic voids and intervals pertinent to symmetric or binary structures that recur in Concrete works? From an optimistic perspective, such voids do not indicate a lack; rather, in their alternation with graphic or chromatic opposites, they convey the idea of ongoing development. It can therefore be inferred that *Wavy Vibration* and other works present the diagram or scheme of a development that evolves in an ordered manner and in light of the classical ideal of symmetry.

Undoubtedly, such intention, expressed as a desire or projection of the author's will, denotes generosity. However, if viewed not from the perspective of authorial intentionality, but from the point of view of its effect on the observer, the relationship of symmetry proves to equate to a binary mode of perception, according to a never-overcome dichotomy between positive and negative. Such a mode, characteristic of simple mechanisms, can also be seen as reification of a strength or imperative motive, incessantly restored regardless of the observer's reception.

Thus, when it becomes predictable and unsurpassable, such a structural organisation – restricted to an A–B oscillation – has features of determinism such as that of the physical laws that govern pendular movement – which also reminds us of the exemplarity of *Wavy Vibration*, our first example. Thus, instead of historical or social relations, capable of change, what emerges is a movement seen as a machine or natural law – in any case, not at all as a historical and political process.

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39 See, for example, Geraldo de Barros, *Movement x Movement (Movimento x Movimento, 1952)*, reproduced in: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra3996/movimento-contra-movimento>.

The synthesis of the two observations about *Wavy Vibration* – one made from the authorial point of view, the other from the viewpoint of the observer – therefore poses an impasse or contradictory result: on the one hand, the scheme of a process, imbued with fair and desirable qualities – symmetry and suchlike – and, on the other, an allusion to a mechanical or natural process which asserts itself as determinism and transcends the observer.

### The Perspective of Objective Form

Faced with such a contradiction, what is to be done? Let us shift our perspective and investigative mode. What does the point of view of ‘objective form’, as conceived by Candido, tell us? Does it allow us to overcome the contradiction of sensations and values generated by *Wavy Vibration*?

From the point of view of ‘objective form’, we must assume that the programmes of symmetrical or binary structures, recurrent in Concrete Art, aesthetically materialise the structural duality of an objective historical process. How and why do they do so? Precisely as variants of an ‘objective form’, linked to a ‘general rhythm of society’.

In this regard, could there be a ‘general rhythm’ of society, governed by strong and immutable polarities, following a dichotomy whose overcoming is out of sight? Or could there be a duality that is unceasingly reinstated, following the concrete current diagrams?

In short, if things are put as such from the point of view of ‘objective form’, what kind of historical-social functioning would this constitute? What kind of general process are we talking about? Or, in Schwarz’s terms, which ‘practical-historical substance’ is involved here or takes the form of symmetrical or binary structures?

### From Aesthetic Reduction to Practical-Historical Relations

From the aesthetic form, resting, as we saw, on a structural and unresolved duality, we must now intuit – thus moving in opposition to ‘aesthetic formalisation’ – a corresponding ‘practical-historical substance’. What can we find in this sense?

Now, the historical period at hand presented a discursive paradigm – this time explicitly referring to the ‘general rhythm’, which expressed, albeit in another domain, the same constants in question: namely, a dual or polarised structure, translated into a ‘practical-historical’ process, which cyclically restored itself and whose overcoming was out of sight.

This was the analytical theory of *underdevelopment*, linked to the proposition of a particular planning paradigm, which aimed to promote, through the expansion of industrialisation, a certain model of development capable of overcoming *underdevelopment*.

At the time this was the national-developmental programme, advocated by the analysis of *underdevelopment*, combined with the theory of planned development, as proposed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC, or CEPAL, as it is referred to in Latin America) – then directed by the Argentine economist Raul Prebisch, seconded by the Brazilian economist Celso Furtado.<sup>40</sup>

Emblematic of the then current national-developmental theses, the course of Furtado's research revealed what was at the time considered a 'general rhythm' based on duality, or, in Schwarz's terms, the dichotomous structure of a 'practical-historical substance'.

Such aspects were then presented by the economic theory of the specific structure of *underdevelopment*. The latter was seen, according to Francisco de Oliveira's synthesis in *A Navegação Venturosa: Ensaios sobre Celso Furtado* [Fortunate Navigation: Essays on Celso Furtado],<sup>41</sup> as a modern formation contemporaneous with the development of central economies. In this sense, the analytic of *underdevelopment* did not take such a complex phenomenon as one stage of a linear chain, but instead saw it as a contemporary formation in reciprocal determination with developed economies, to which the underdeveloped nation transfers capital.

In this diagnosis, the fundamental structure of *underdevelopment* rests on the structural *duality* or dichotomy between two strongly unequal sectors of the national economy. They are the export sector, linked to the international

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40 The author of *The Economic Growth of Brazil: A Survey from Colonial to Modern Times* (1963) [*Formação Econômica do Brasil*, 1959], Celso Furtado, after integrating UNECLAC (CEPAL) as director of the division of research on development, from 1949 to 1957, held several public positions in Brazil, with planning functions, in the governments of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956–61) – for whom he conceived and directed the Superintendency of Development of the Northeast (SUDENE) – and João Goulart (1961–4), in which he also served as Minister of Planning. For a comprehensive interpretation of the economic history of Brazil, see Furtado 2007; English translation: Furtado 1963a. Furtado also produced other studies on Brazil in the 1950s: Furtado 1954, 1956, 1958, and 1959. For Furtado's account of his research at UNECLAC, see Furtado 1997a, pp. 87–359; for his experiences at the head of SUDENE and in other state positions in the Kubitschek and Goulart administrations, see Furtado 1997b, pp. 27–306.

41 Oliveira 2003b.

market and said to be ‘modern’ – consisting of specialisation in the production of primary goods (coffee, meat, soy or mineral goods) – and an economic sector, said to be ‘backward’, oriented to ‘subsistence agriculture’, whose ‘own dynamics [are revealed to be] impervious to what is happening in the “modern” exporting sector’.<sup>42</sup>

### Virtues and Impasses of ‘Dual-Structuralism’

The first elaboration of such ideas dates back to 1950 when Furtado was already part of UNECLAC’s (CEPAL) research division. Thus, they were practically contemporaneous with the emergence, in Brazil, of the abstract-geometric paradigm, which happened in the wake of its appearance in Argentina – where, not by chance, the cycle of structural reforms started earlier than in Brazil.

Oliveira, who worked with Furtado at SUDENE, emphasises the novelty of Furtado’s ‘dual-structuralist’ diagnosis, in many aspects. Thus, the dual-structuralist programme, in addition to conceiving of *underdevelopment* in reciprocal determination with the development of central economies, also presupposed, in parallel, a governmentally planned intervention in favour of urgent agrarian reform. Such reform aimed at overcoming the structural duality between the advanced and the backward sectors of the Brazilian economy.

Despite his sympathy for these aspects of Furtado’s thinking and actions as a public planner, Oliveira’s study also critically highlights the centrality of *developmentalist optimism* – the prevailing belief at the time. Such optimism was also shared with other South American countries engaged in similar ‘import substitution’ programmes through accelerated industrialisation.<sup>43</sup> Driven by the optimistic national developmentalist belief in progress, the dual-structuralist scheme carried with it a serious blind spot, according to Oliveira. Thus, when critically reviewing, in 1972,<sup>44</sup> the perspective of ‘dualist reason’ – which, ten years prior to the 1964 coup, had underpinned the industrialising reform programme heralded by the reformist ideas – Oliveira emphasised that

42 See Oliveira 2003b, pp. 12–13.

43 For the intellectual optimism of Furtado in the 1950s, see below. The military coup and exile led him towards an important review of his thinking. See Oliveira 2003b, pp. 11–38.

44 The essay ‘A economia brasileira: crítica à razão dualista’ [published in English as ‘A critique of dualist reason: the Brazilian economy since 1930’] was published for the first time in *Estudos Cebrap*, No. 2, São Paulo, Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento, 1972 (Oliveira 1972), re-edited as Oliveira e Sá Jr. 1975–6 and turned into a book: Oliveira 1981. For a recent reprint, see Oliveira 2003a; English translation: Oliveira 1985.

the UNECLAC-Furtadian thesis of duality is distinguished from the general and historical establishment of ‘uneven and combined development’ of Marxist tradition ... precisely because, for Furtado and UNECLAC, development is uneven *but not combined*. [Thus] both sectors do not interact: the ‘backward’ sector is only an obstacle to the growth of the ‘modern’ sector, especially because, on the one hand, it does not create an internal market and, on the other, it does not meet the requirements of food demand (of the modern sector).<sup>45</sup>

In the UNECLAC-Furtadian argument, thus, the ‘backwardness of the “backward” ... becomes an *obstacle* to the expansion of the “modern”, among other reasons, because it hindered the process of accumulation or capital formation.<sup>46</sup>

In these terms, the rationalist interpretation of the pockets of poverty and backwardness ultimately turned them into sites of the system’s irrationality. As a consequence, ‘against the blockages of backwardness and the evils of structural duality’, Furtado proposed as a ‘remedy ... *to become industrialised ... in order to break out of the vicious circle of underdevelopment*’.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the aforementioned innovative critical aspect of conceiving underdevelopment as a modern and specific economic formation,<sup>48</sup> for Oliveira, the theory of *underdevelopment*, when converted into industrialist ideology, ‘*also ... masks new class interests ... now [put] as “interests of the Nation”*’.<sup>49</sup>

### The Developmentalist Blind Spot

In effect, according to the rationalist and unilateral perspective prevalent in his pre-1964 work, Furtado had sought, ‘in the manner of neoclassical econom-

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45 Emphasis added by Oliveira. See Oliveira 2003b, p. 13.

46 Emphasis added by Oliveira. See *ibid*.

47 For Furtado, industrialisation would solve the problem posed at the external front, by the Gordian knot of foreign trade – exclusively of primary goods whose prices continually deteriorate and constitute uneven or unbalanced exchanges. In parallel, on the domestic front, important economic and social changes would be promoted: the implementation of an urgent programme of agrarian reform, and, consequently, the creation of an internal market, an increase in food supply, etc. The sum of these factors would reinforce the development of industrialisation as a sustained process. See Oliveira 2003b, pp. 14–15.

48 See Oliveira 2003b, pp. 109–10.

49 Emphasis added by Oliveira. See Oliveira 2003b, p. 15.



ists, to present just an “economic” theory of economy’. That is, unlike Marx, it was not about political economy, stated in materialistic and dialectical terms, through which the relations of power and domination underlying the relations of production are replaced, reproduced and recycled, so as to incessantly rebuild, in turn, the general sociability in terms of inequality and domination.<sup>50</sup>

In short, the absence of a concrete class analysis, the blind spot concerning the political question,<sup>51</sup> essentially constituted the conservative limit of both UNECLAC’s and Furtado’s theses, as Oliveira points out.<sup>52</sup> In fact, only in 1966, two years after the coup and already in exile, would Celso Furtado recognise that ‘industrialisation, in the concrete conditions of our continent, *concentrates* income instead of operating a better income distribution’.<sup>53</sup> This is how Oliveira sums up the situation on the basis of Furtado’s book *Subdesenvolvimento e Estagnação na América Latina* (1966),<sup>54</sup> and subsequent works.

For an aesthetic analysis made from the point of view of ‘objective form’, it is crucial to note that the contemporary prestige of the national-developmental theses, along with their blind spot, as contemporary historical formations, might have constituted elements of the ‘practical-historical’ substance. The latter was correlated with the aesthetic-symbolic scheme of geometric abstraction and its blind spots. Can we obtain further details in this regard?

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50 In discussing Furtado’s ideas in the book *A Pré-Revolução Brasileira* (1962; published in English as an article: ‘Brazil: what kind of revolution?’, 1963, see Furtado 1962 and 1963b, respectively), Oliveira affirms: ‘Furtado tried to demonstrate that in relation to the level reached by the Brazilian economic, social and political process, *any revolution will mean a step backward*’. See Oliveira 2003b, p. 24. See also pp. 25–7.

51 ‘Strictly speaking, politics in the theory of underdevelopment is an epiphenomenon’. See Oliveira 2003b, p. 18.

52 ‘[B]ecause he did not incorporate Marx’s theories on the internationalisation of capital [Furtado] will only realise some time after that the industrialisation recommended was realised in most Latin American countries through associations with foreign capital ... which certainly does not lead to any “antagonistic contradiction” between commodity-producing countries and manufacturing-producing countries. In modern capitalism, the international division of labour is much less structured by a “division among nations” than by an “internal division of labour”’. Therefore, at the end of its developments, *dual-structuralism* will fail in the aim of ‘understanding the real articulations between the two sectors (the “backward” and the “modern”) and the dialectical form of such coexistence’ See Oliveira 2003b, p. 17.

53 Emphasis added by Oliveira. See Oliveira 2003b, p. 18.

54 See Furtado 1966. The third chapter of the Brazilian book corresponded to an article originally published in English: Furtado 1965.

### From the Myth of Planning to National-Illusionism

From the analysis of *Wavy Vibration* and similar works, we deduced that the generous ethical expectations, invested by the poetics of Concrete Art through its symmetric or binary schemes, come into contradiction with the observer's experience. In fact, the observer finds himself subjected to an imperious mechanism that transcends him. Let us further examine the related implications of such nexuses.

The *Ruptura* manifesto, in the wake of the Parisian charter of Concrete art, explicitly listed in 1952 a series of dichotomies concerning artistic procedures, which revolved around the opposition between the 'old' and the 'new'.<sup>55</sup> However, beyond such dichotomies it became clear that a set of structural relations of the symbolic process went unnoticed and substantially unchanged – despite the many innovations introduced by geometrical poetics. Nothing new, after all, in the face of what occurred around white metropolitan Constructivism.

Having taken into account the parallel and the maieutical analogies between the planning optimism of 'dual-structuralism' and the planned aesthetic renewal – the latter, according to the proposal of Concrete Art, just focused on the procedures of art production and circulation – it becomes clear that in both cases *the Gordian knot resides in the unilateralism of the pure planning of the action*. Both perspectives minimise the importance of social relations and political practices. Thus, in white constructivism, power relations remain untouched, as long as they are naively supposed – in the basic and essential assumptions of such perspectives – as essentially rational and extra-political, or are simply ignored.

Ultimately, the symbolic paradigm of geometric abstraction, not limited to the realm of aesthetics, but in fact rooted in productive realms – such as the design of goods, architecture and urban planning (see the case of Brasília) – consisted of a programme of 'national-illusionism'. As such, it was subordinated to the mythology of progress and, on the political plane, to the ideology of conciliation or mere negation of class conflicts.

### Trojan Horse

That said, a fissure emerged in the citadel of geometric abstraction. Nevertheless, since it happened within the historical period in question, it is also

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55 See Cordeiro et al. 1977, p. 69.

strategically important to note and discuss it as an initial symptom of what would become a long chain of historically decisive unfoldings. It presented itself by means of a distinct intuition in another work by Sacilotto, *Concretion* 5629. While still in an embryonic state, as it emerged, it manifested itself in the manner of vertigo.<sup>56</sup> Even if limited to sensory phenomena, the work activated the observer's spontaneity.<sup>57</sup>

Mário Pedrosa promptly took notice of the novelty and discussed it in the article 'Paulistas e Cariocas' (Rio de Janeiro, *Jornal do Brasil*, 19 February 1957). In respect of Sacilotto's *Concretion* 5629, Pedrosa stressed the virtual power of the construction, based on white and black triangles, which provoked the 'perceptual ambivalence' and triggered the 'captivating play of visuality [that] continues to alternate itself indefinitely'.<sup>58</sup>

Precisely, in contrast to the previous Concrete artworks which maintained the centrality of the vanishing point, the new dynamics involved in this case involve the living, open and indefinite experience of the act of observation. In effect, Pedrosa's critical acumen, in detecting the novelty of the phenomenon at the heart of Concrete Art, was more than acute; it possessed great historical sense. From our contemporary perspective, it seems strategically decisive.

Precisely this gap and its sensitive point – that of the vivification of active observation – will form a substantial part of what will lead to the constitution of the Neo-Concrete platform, only two years after Sacilotto's innovative experience. Hence, the spontaneous activity of the observer will also further mature the concept of 'participation', which will be central not only to Neo-Concrete Art, but also to the process of its critical overcoming.

In fact, the strategy of 'participation', through important developments in the following years, would rupture the purity of abstraction's walls and, in the terms of Neo-Concrete Art, would adjust the subjectivity of the observer to geometric abstraction.

56 Reproduction available at: <http://www.sacilotto.com.br/relevos/>, first slide.

57 Sacilotto's finding can also be understood as a demonstration of the vigour and consistency obtained by the modern visual system in Brazil, at that time already in an accelerated process of agglutination. Thus, Sacilotto's perceptive provocation either precedes or at least runs on an independent track in relation to the characteristic operations of the trend of 'optical art', as it would come to be internationally known. In fact, one year earlier, in 1955, Victor Vasarely had published a manifesto (*Manifeste Jaune*, Paris, galerie Denise René, 1955), raising questions that would later produce this denomination – but only after the exhibition ten years later at The Museum of Modern Art: *The Responsive Eye* (New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 23 February–25 April 1965). See *Foundation Vasarely*: <http://www.fondationvasarely.fr> retrieved 6 March 2009.

58 See Pedrosa 1998d, p. 254; English translation: Pedrosa 2015d, p. 274.

Even if, at first, as assumed by phenomenology, such incorporation were to take place in abstract and impersonal terms, the notion of 'participation' would function as a Trojan horse, breaching the walls of white Constructivism.

Out of its core, a critical reflective process would develop which would come to give 'objective forms' to the analysis of classes and to further issues such as racial segregation, anti-imperialism, decolonisation, and psychological 'de-conditioning'. As is known, the trend of Brazilian geometric abstraction would not resist such inputs, and – while the formalists refuse to admit it – it would be synthesised into a new realism: the New Brazilian Objectivity [*Nova Objetividade Brasileira*].

## Trees of Brazil

### Abstraction and Malaise

It has been 40 years since the beginning of the generalised commitment in Brazilian art circles to erase the critical transition from Neo-Concretism and Concrete Art to the realist movements, New Figuration (Nova Figuração, 1965) and New Brazilian Objectivity (Nova Objetividade Brasileira, 1967), both of which put an end to the hegemony of geometric abstraction in Brazilian art. It is commonplace to pretend that this never happened. The ‘family secret’, kept under lock and key, and the malaise caused by this passage, appear in reverse mode in the form of the apologia of the Neo-Concrete movement and the so-called ‘Brazilian constructive project’, regarded as the only legitimate tradition.<sup>1</sup>

Why so? What can be said beforehand is that the enthronement of the so-called ‘Brazilian Constructive project’ is practically simultaneous with the implementation of the political transition negotiated in Brazil which aimed at the so-called ‘restoration of democracy’, along the lines of the ‘Spanish transition’ as the exit out of the Franco dictatorship. These two creatures share the same lifeblood.

I cannot go very deep into these two nexuses and aspects here. I leave it to the reader to pull the threads and draw conclusions, if he so wishes. Here I will prioritise the recovery of those passages and parts of the discussion eviscerated and buried away by those who felt uncomfortable.

### Nausea

Which family is in charge of these processes? Who are the ones who feel nauseous, and why? The fact is that the process that took place after 1964 in the Brazilian visual arts became the equivalent of the ‘lost decade’, according to the jargon of financial journalism, in reference to periods in which the political process breaks away from the control of finance. The Neo-Concrete movement,

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1 On the so-called ‘Brazilian constructive project in art’, see Chapter 3, in this volume.

in turn, as a momentary fetish, has become a relic of the modern, clean and advanced country – that is, white and free of conflicts, according to the myth of the ‘country of conciliation’, and without class struggle. Let us return to the question at hand.

### Transition: Internal Causality or Eclecticism?

We know that ‘a fundamental stage in overcoming dependency is the capacity to produce works of the first order, influenced by previous national examples, not by immediate foreign models.’<sup>2</sup> This is what historian and literary critic Antonio Candido calls the constitution of an *internal causality*. In view of this concern, the question is: to what extent did the negation of geometric abstraction – that is, both of Concrete and Neo-Concrete art, proposed in 1965 by New Figuration – correspond to an *internal causality*, thus establishing a dialectical continuity with the previous moment?

Or, on the contrary, after almost a decade and a half of the hegemony of geometric abstraction in the Brazilian visual arts, did this negation present a *failure* in the *internal causality*, a relapse in the volubility of eclecticism, in the series of senseless successions inherent to the Brazilian visual tradition as a characteristically dependent culture?

In fact, we must recognise that at first glance there are many signs of eclecticism in New Figuration: there are elements of Pop art, mixed with signs of geometry, expressionism, etc. What do they have in common? An observer steeped in the categories of art history of the central economies would find it hard to imagine a more incongruous set of features.<sup>3</sup>

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2 See Candido 1989b, p. 153; English translation: Candido 2014b, p. 131.

3 See, for example, the image of Antonio Dias, *Note on the Unforeseen Death* [*Nota sobre a Morte Imprevista*, 1965] in Dias 2009, p. 81, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#82](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#82); see also *The Hero's Remains* [*Os Restos do Herói*, 1965], reproduced in Dias 2009, p. 73, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#74](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#74). Please note: hereafter the page indication concerning the images always refers to the catalogue page number, and not to the electronic or pdf file number (unless indicated otherwise).

### Dias and Oiticica: Refounding Realism

The artistic work of Antonio Dias (Campina Grande, Paraíba, 1944) emerged during the crisis from Neo-Concretism to New Figuration.<sup>4</sup> His work is the best evidence of the tenor of this transition. I will therefore direct my attention chiefly to his work, in addition to works and writings of Hélio Oiticica (1937–80), who also participated in the historical exhibition *Opinion 65* (*Opinião 65*, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 12 August–12 September 1965),<sup>5</sup> in which New Figuration emerged in Brazil with great impact.<sup>6</sup> Oiticica wrote a sharp and dialectically intense essay that was a genuinely reflective memorial in response to the transition from Neo-Concretism to New Figuration and New Objectivity. In other words, his reflection utilised a first-person account of the transition from the geometric abstraction movements to the new process of the re-founding and update of realism in the Brazilian visual languages.

Oiticica played a crucial role as a formulator of new concepts during the great effervescence of ideas and debates that arose in reaction to the civil-military coup of 1964.<sup>7</sup> His essay, 'General Scheme of the New Objectivity' ['Esquema geral da Nova Objetividade', 1967] – which resembles a handout or document for discussion for internal circulation among members of a political group – was written for the pocket catalogue of the exhibition *New Brazilian Objectivity* (*Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 6–30 April 1967).

Returning to Dias, at the age of 21 he emerged<sup>8</sup> as one of the leading figures of the exhibition *Opinião 65*. Oiticica referred to Dias, in 'General Scheme of

4 For reproductions of Dias's works, see Dias 2009, available at: [https://www.daros-latnamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/](https://www.daros-latnamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/).

5 The text 'Opinião ... Opinião ... Opinião', by Mário Pedrosa, in Pedrosa 1995a, pp. 203–10, deals with the 1965 and 1966 exhibitions and describes the impact at the time of the 1965 show in a country still largely bemused by the newly installed dictatorship.

6 On the historical discussion of the 1965 exhibition, see also O. Arantes 1986, pp. 69–84. See also Coutinho and Aragão 1995; Favaretto 1995 (review of the catalogue by Coutinho and Aragão 1995).

7 For a synthetic view of the complexity and liveliness of the cultural resistance to the dictatorship, see the sharp analysis in Schwarz 1978, pp. 61–92. The text was originally published under the title 'Remarques sur la culture et la politique au Brésil, 1964–1969', in Schwarz 1970, pp. 37–73. English translation: Schwarz 1992, pp. 126–59.

8 Still in 1965, the same year in which the exhibition *Nova Figuração* was realised, Antonio Dias received two important prizes, the *Jovem Desenho Brasileiro* [Young Brazilian Drawing], at Museu de Arte Contemporânea, of the University of São Paulo, and for painting, at the Paris Biennial. The following year, he took part in the show *Opinião 66*. In 1967, he participated

the New Objectivity', and to Dias's *Note on the Unforeseen Death* [*Nota sobre a Morte Imprevista*, 1965],<sup>9</sup> as a 'turning point' for Brazilian art.<sup>10</sup> In the following years, the vigour of Dias's work only deepened and revealed the importance of his initial impact.

### At the Heart of Formation

This dialogue and others around it have the pulsating rhythm, the effective advances, the real and full awareness of the Brazilian visual system as an established reality. Thus, Oiticica explicitly confronted the lucidity and originality achieved by this state of reason and enunciation to the major movements of world art (Op and Pop). In this way, he emphasised in his text 'Tropicália' (1968): '*Tropicália* is the very first conscious, objective attempt to impose an obviously Brazilian image upon the current context of the avant-garde and national art manifestations in general'.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, between Dias's *Note on the Unforeseen Death* [*Nota sobre a Morte Imprevista*, 1965] and Oiticica's passage to the realism of environmental art, some of the decisive links in the constitution of this system were woven. The emerging objective forms brought an originality and vigour that stood out from the tradition of international modern art, showcasing the maturity of the Brazilian visual system. The works of Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Glauber Rocha and others, have become global milestones in the decolonisation of languages.

In 'Tropicália', Oiticica detailed the overcoming of the 'myth of universality' through the 'consciousness of a non-conditioning', marked by Afro and Indians cultures, the only ones that did not surrender to European culture.<sup>12</sup> Such

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in the exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, which will be discussed below, while later that year he resided in Paris, having received a grant from the French government. He participated in exhibitions in Paris, Bern and Düsseldorf. In 1968, he moved to Milan. He also lived for a time in Cologne, Germany. Today, he keeps two residencies, in Rio de Janeiro and Milan. See Duarte 1998b, pp. 195–6.

9 See image of Antonio Dias, *Note on the Unforeseen Death* [*Nota sobre a Morte Imprevista*, 1965] in Dias 2009, p. 81, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#82](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#82).

10 Oiticica 1967; 1997c, pp. 110–20 (with English translation); 2011c, pp. 87–101 (English translation: pp. 227–33).

11 See Oiticica 1997e, p. 124; Oiticica 2011e, p. 108 (English translation on p. 237). First published in Oiticica 1984.

12 See Oiticica 1997e, pp. 124–5; Oiticica 2011e, pp. 108–9 (English translation on pp. 237–8).



unconditioned or independent qualities resulted in an original visual discourse and at the same time in a critical and reflective condition, in the field of visual languages, in relation to the contemporaneous historical process – a process, as we know, that brought many tragic events.

The ability to reveal the present, transmuting its ephemerality into objective forms, and to simultaneously make its tragic dimension explicit, were the two fundamental challenges for modern art, as formulated by Baudelaire.<sup>13</sup> The text ‘Tropicália’, from March 1968, and the eponymous installation that preceded it in April 1967,<sup>14</sup> as well as related measures and steps, demonstrated the synthetic, autonomous, and full realisation of these objective forms of collective reflection and expression.

Here I will follow a zigzag path between the works of Dias and the works and texts of Oiticica, seeking to evoke, from this dialogue, nexuses and decisive steps of this cycle of works, which were at the apex of the Brazilian system of visual arts. For its decisive protagonists and agents, this moment marked the corollary of the preceding *formative cycle*, of an unprecedented preparatory tenor. Such an early formative cycle took place around the paradigmatic vector of geometric abstraction, which lasted until the military coup of 1964 that deposed Goulart’s government.

### ‘Turning Point’: From Tectonics to Labyrinth

When one compares the works of Dias with those of the preceding generation, one finds a difference of principle. Thus, the relation that the Neo-Concrete sculptures of Amilcar de Castro<sup>15</sup> propose with the horizontal dimensions of the environment, which they incorporate and for which they open up, is even

13 On the conception of modern art, according to Baudelaire, see Martins 2014a, pp. 27–44; Martins 2017a, pp. 14–28.

14 See image of Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália* (*Tropicália*, 1967), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66335/tropicalia>.

15 See images of Amilcar de Castro’s sculptures at: <http://www.institutoamilcardecastro.com.br/corte-e-dobra.html>, particularly images (first column, top to bottom) n. 3: *Untitled* (1958, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna); n. 5: *Untitled* (1999, Uberaba-Minas Gerais, Universidade de Uberaba); n. 8: *Untitled* (1997, Belo Horizonte, Câmara Municipal); n. 10: *Untitled* (1995, Berlin); and images (second column, top to bottom) n. 8: *Untitled* (1995, Vitória-Espírito Santo, Cais das Artes); and n. 12: *Untitled* (1980’s Belo Horizonte, Assembleia Legislativa de Minas Gerais).

today one of its decisive vectors of meaning. Analogously, Amilcar's sculptures also interact with the ground, and, in the condition of constructed structures, distribute the forces from the clash between the decisive weight of iron and the thrust of the tectonic response of the ground.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, a fundamental part of its meaning *comes from the ground*, drawing attention to that on which we stand. There are, thus, two modalities of spatial relation proposed by Amilcar de Castro's sculptures: one is like a window, full of possibilities, mediating our visual interface with the horizon, inseparable from an imaginary component; the other is more severe, resistant and objective, the tectonic response of the thrust that measures and defines our position from the moment we place a foot on the ground.

These dialogues that occur at two different frequencies combine to establish the situation of the spectator, like the future and the past that permeate the subject's present. In view of the frank and explicit interactions between the sculpture and its surrounding elements, such dialogues assume and refer to a fabric of relations. They echo, or rather are consonant with, a continuous and cohesive cultural formation as an autonomous, unified, and consistent system.

In short, these nexuses, which Amilcar de Castro's sculptures symbolically assume and intensify, recall the sovereign affirmation of a system of cultural values. Thus, the idea of a totality, like a unified and sovereign nation, pervades and illuminates such sculptures. Therefore, it can be said that Amilcar's Neo-Concrete sculptures, as well as some by other artists, are like studies or sketches of a national project, the subject of ongoing discussions.

Thus, the geometry-based<sup>17</sup> formulation of Neo-Concrete poetics corresponded to the manifestation of a penetrating and assertive intelligence, which seemed to effectively see the constitutive structure of the world and the nexus of its situations. In such terms, Neo-Concrete poetics translated these nexuses into what it understood as structural plastic values.

In this sense, Neo-Concrete art denoted optimism and revealed the feeling of cognitively possessing a lively and perfect whole. In such art there reverberated

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16 Oiticica resumed the idea of 'stepping in treading the earth' in the installation *Tropicália* [1967, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna]. In it, he elaborated such an experiment through the use of plants, sand and pebbles. The expression 'stepping in treading the earth', in turn, is from the aforementioned Oiticica 1997e, p. 124; 2011e, p. 108 (English translation: p. 238).

17 See images of Lygia Clark, *Matchbox Structures* [*Estruturas de Caixas de Fósforo*, 1964], at: [http://press.moma.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/lygiaclarkchecklistupdated5.14.14.pdf](http://press.moma.org/wp-content/files_mf/lygiaclarkchecklistupdated5.14.14.pdf), pp. 47–9.

a totality that transcended it. It can be said that the paradigm of the idea of nation thus operated on another plane – implied by the sculpture – as an autonomous and larger process that tainted or invaded its parts.

In effect, Neo-Concrete poetics and its emphasis on the idea of *participation*<sup>18</sup> were intrinsically linked to the progressive and patriotic environment of promise and optimism in the face of the future.<sup>19</sup> That is, briefly, of the hopes that characterised the years of national-developmentalism before the military coup of 1964.

### Incongruity or New Truth?

In contrast, the works of New Figuration were not lodged directly in the space, as were many Neo-Concrete works. Instead, they were first of all distinguished by the use of images, frequently combined with other materials, often of prosaic use (synthetic stuff, many kinds of plastic, etc). These blends, as sign and effect, unlike the crystalline and distinct character of geometry, proposed a hyper-reality in itself with an ambiguity, triggering various kinds of strangeness.

In fact, the image, in its condition of imaginary entity – more real than reality – appeared as a deviation, or it operated as a spell between the subject and reality. Thus, before the ambiguous character of the image, the subject's assumption of direct access to the object or to reality was obscured. Or – to rephrase the question beyond the rationalist perspective in which reason and will coincide – before the image, the subject was dragged away by the gaze, captured by the image. Thus, he was seized and hijacked by something outside of his control.

In conclusion, the point of view alluded to in the works of Antonio Dias was no longer that of an assertive and optimistic stance, fixed firmly on the ground and able to dominate the horizon, stepping confidently and seizing the space.

18 According to an outline of the notion of 'participation', in Lygia Clark's notebook: 'the work [of art] must demand immediate spectator participation and he, the spectator, must be thrown into it'. *Apud* Pedrosa 1998f, p. 350; and Pedrosa 1981d, p. 197 (English translation: Pedrosa 2015f, p. 300). On the notion of 'participation' 'as the spectator's active interaction with the aesthetic object', see Oiticica 1967 ('Item 3'; 1997c, pp. 115–16; 2011c, pp. 96–7 (English translation: p. 231). See also Chapter 1, in this volume.

19 See image of Lygia Clark, *Pocket Creature* [*Bicho de Bolso*, 1966], at: [http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/lygia-clark-bicho-de-bolso\\_0.jpg](http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/lygia-clark-bicho-de-bolso_0.jpg).

In summing up the differences between New Figuration and Neo-Concretism, let us try to outline the field of inquiry: in synthesis, after the 1964 coup,<sup>20</sup> a new correlation of forces was established and, accordingly, a problematic emerged for which the image became a crucial resource. How and why did this happen?

First of all, a distinction should be made; or rather, we ought to note the qualitative difference between the nexus of geometry and that of the image. Clarity of geometry and the transparency of *participation*<sup>21</sup> withered away, in the terms described, from the New Figuration's surroundings. The optimism and the feeling of possessing the future also vanished. And instead of a continuous and fertile surrounding, which duplicated the bond of each one to the nation as a whole, discontinuous spatial relations set in. These were derived from language models generated who-knows-where, and whose alleged viewpoint appeared to be subject to an alien power. Its symbol was given by the effect of the overriding image.<sup>22</sup>

Having established the question, let us advance a hypothesis: the use of the image, a central part of the syncretic device of New Figuration, possibly enunciated *a new truth*, which could only be affirmed through such means. Accordingly, it was articulated by the combination of disparate elements. Here, Pop art, geometry and Expressionism, etc.

If this were the case, if this incongruous enunciation – babbling, shout or whisper – were true, it can also be assumed that the perspectives offered by the artistic aspects of geometric abstraction, the Concrete and Neo-Concrete movements, could no longer correspond to the complexity of the course of events and the issues right after the coup. Having set out the hypothesis, let us explore the works and see how they respond to it.

20 See image of Antonio Dias, *Winner?* [*Vencedor?*, 1965], at: [http://www.culturanageroi.com.br/macniteroi/publicacoes/arq/27\\_MAC-de-Niteroi-10anos.pdf](http://www.culturanageroi.com.br/macniteroi/publicacoes/arq/27_MAC-de-Niteroi-10anos.pdf), p. 57.

21 See image of Hélio Oiticica, *Grand Nucleus* [*Grande Núcleo*, 1960], at: <http://54.232.114.233/extranet/enciclopedia/ho/enciclopediaic/normal/254394.jpg>; see also *NC 1 Small Nucleus n. 01* (*NC 1 Pequeno Núcleo n. 1*, 1960), at: [http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/helio\\_oiticica\\_nc1\\_small\\_nucleus\\_and\\_children.jpg](http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/helio_oiticica_nc1_small_nucleus_and_children.jpg).

22 See image of Antonio Dias, *In the Dark* [*Na Escuridão*, 1967], at: [http://mamrio.org.br/wp/colecoes/colecao-gilberto-chateaubriand-mam-rio/antonio-dias\\_218-3/](http://mamrio.org.br/wp/colecoes/colecao-gilberto-chateaubriand-mam-rio/antonio-dias_218-3/).

## The Trauma of the 1964 Coup as a Threshold

The path runs through several works of Dias, from the period of 1964–7: Prisoner's Smoke [Fumaça do Prisioneiro, 1964];<sup>23</sup> Note on the Unforeseen Death [Nota sobre Morte Imprevista, 1965];<sup>24</sup> The Bond: Me and You [O Laço: Eu e Você, 1965];<sup>25</sup> My Portrait [O Meu Retrato, 1967];<sup>26</sup> Untitled (1967);<sup>27</sup> The American Death/ The Invader (1968),<sup>28</sup> etc.

All these works can be aligned, since they shared the same structure. How to specify this structure? In a first approach, elements from Pop art immediately stood out and so did figures and clichés from mass culture, as well as the strongly discontinuous syntax, which alluded to the photomontages of Soviet art in the 1920s. The montage also brought up modular units, geometric parts and colours, predominantly red, black and white, all evoking Soviet Constructivism in their primordial sensory impact.

In combining such heterogeneous elements, there was a tension that was never hidden or appeased, but rather emphasised in each object. Each piece exhibited discontinuity and heterogeneity with the conviction of a logic.

Once the hypothesis has been proposed and the structure of the corresponding works has been identified, what is to be done? To analyse the relations. In other words, one must: 1) Investigate what general process was established in Brazil after 1964 and specify its new course in relation to the preceding one; 2) Determine the quality of the relation that the heterogeneous language resources of New Figuration established among themselves and, effectively, with the new situation; 3) If they prove cohesive and necessary, they will have demonstrated their objective correctness and their own value in the face of that specific conjuncture.

In this case, it will be necessary to measure them in the light of the paradigm of geometric abstraction, which prevailed in the previous period. Then one will

23 See image at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra5790/fumaca-do-prisioneiro>.

24 See image in Dias 2009, p. 81, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#82](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#82).

25 See image at: <http://www.nararoessler.com.br/artists/33-antonio-dias/>, slide number 15.

26 See image in Dias 2009, p. 44, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#46](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#46).

27 See image in Dias 2009, p. 82, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#84](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#84).

28 See image in Dias 2009, p. 26, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#28](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#28).

be able to ask: what was the relation between the works of New Figuration and those of the previous cycle, of Concrete and Neo-Concrete art? Or: what occurred between geometric abstraction and New Figuration? Was it a mere break? Was it merely a dual opposition or a simple difference?

Or, conversely, instead of a mere difference, was it a superseding negation, which comprised a sublation of relations? In other words, did it encompass elements of the earlier stage of the process, and did it develop them according to a new synthesis?

Would such a passage then eventually comprise the linkage, that is, the consolidation of the modern Brazilian visual system? Or, more precisely, would such a passage be one of the keystones of its building, based on a process of intertwined relations and reciprocal determination of its parts?

### Bitter Awakening

Antonio Dias's work emerged and reached its early adulthood soon after the military coup of 1964.<sup>29</sup> As such, his work did not arise from an optimistic and hopeful ground; rather, it grew out of a historical and psychosocial framework of *trauma*.

In this context, the relationship of the subject with reality, far from comprehending the optimistic assumption of full and direct contact, could only bring pain and anxiety. Impotence and crushing sensations stood out, in stark contrast to the previous art. To see as much, one need only glance at two works of that time. One, from the year before the military coup, bore a title that would be an omen of times to come: *The Man who was Run Over* [*O Homem que foi Atropelado*, 1963]. The other, from the year of the coup, in its convulsive syntax and in colours that repel one another (yellow, red, white and black), expressed revul-

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29 The structuring of Dias's work dates back to 1964/5. In fact, he had already had an individual exhibition in 1962 at the Galeria Sobradinho in Rio de Janeiro, when he was 18 years old – and his work included abstract forms of Indian inspiration. Moreover, he had also received first prize in drawing in the xx Exhibition of Fine Arts of Paraná [*Salão Paranaense de Artes Plásticas*, 1963]. But it was really at the exhibition in December 1964 at Galeria Relevô in Rio de Janeiro that Dias's work acquired its own characteristics, leading to what he would present the following year in the collective exhibition *Opinião 65*.

sion and disgust: *Nausea Game* [*Jogo da Náusea*, 1964].<sup>30</sup> The pain and nausea in question were not individual, but pertained to a collective subject – let's say, the nation under armoured vehicles, a fear that is somehow anticipated in the painting from 1963.

Having duly buried and established the anachronism of the optimistic symbolic cycle – befitting the tonic of the 1950s and early '60s – we must now seek to correlate the heterogeneous resources and syncretic findings of Antonio Dias to the social rhythms inherent in primitive accumulation and state violence sanctioned as forms and practices of the new order, since the coup.

### Enigmas and Dilemmas

From the outset, this stage prompts some interrelated questions: 1) Why were the Concrete and Neo-Concrete movements no longer apposite to the new situation? 2) What was the logic of the new plastic stance, and how did it respond to the situation? 3) If its apparently incongruous and heterogeneous discourse had a *raison d'être*, how and to what extent did it plastically correspond to the new truth of the moment?

As for the anachronism of the Neo-Concrete and Concrete art movements – in short, geometric abstraction – amid the new historical conjuncture, let us begin by considering the clear and vivid words of critic Mário Pedrosa; in addition, let us also recall two other decisive texts, by Oiticica, which were also written at that crucial moment, namely 'Fundamental Bases for a Definition of Parangolé' ['Bases fundamentais para uma definição do Parangolé'], from November 1964, and 'General Scheme of the New Objectivity' ['Esquema geral da Nova Objetividade'], written some two years later for the catalogue of the exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* [Brazilian New Objectivity], in April 1967.

In short, I will prioritise here some of the propositions of the latter, which are decisive for the discussion and the role of Dias in the transition. 'General Scheme ...' reflects on the convergence between the slow shift towards the 'realistic dialectic' operated by Oiticica himself, Lygia Clark and Waldemar Cordeiro, while highlighting, in parallel, the explosive, sudden, and catalytic

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30 See image in Dias 2009, p. 75, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#76](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#76).

role of Dias's works,<sup>31</sup> especially *Note on the Unforeseen Death* [*Nota sobre a Morte Imprevista*, 1965].<sup>32</sup>

### Popular Initiation, or Snapshots of an Artistic Turning Point

I will take a shortcut through the existential-political choice made by Oiticica not to dwell on the minutiae of a transition. Oiticica himself classified his transition from pure plastic values to the synthetic key of New Objectivity's realism as 'slow'. This choice had decisive effects on his poetics.

Thus, he recalled his turning point in 1964, when he later explained, in his 1968 text 'Tropicália', the origins of his installation with the same title originally set out in the exhibition *Brazilian New Objectivity* (*Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 6–30 April 1967).

However, I shall first refer to his friend's testimony as a narrative introduction to this moment. The vivid narration of Oiticica's turning point by the critic Mário Pedrosa was presented in the text 'Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica' ('Arte ambiental, arte pós-moderna, Hélio Oiticica', Rio de

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31 Thus, according to Oiticica, 'to a certain extent, the realist proposition that would come with Dias, Gerchman, and, in another way, with Pedro Escosteguy (in whose objects the word always contains some social message), was a consequence of these premises, raised by Gullar and his group, and also, in a different way, by the "Cinema Novo" movement, which was then at its peak. I consider, then, Antônio Dias' work *Note About the Unforeseen Death* as the decisive turning point in this process of the pictorial-plastic-structural field. In it he affirms, all of a sudden, very profound problems of a socio-ethical and a pictorial-structural order, indicating a new approach to the problem of the object (in reality, this work is an anti-picture, and also a reversal in the concept of picture, of the "passage" to the object, and of the significance of the object itself). From then on there emerges, in Brazil, a veritable process of "passages" towards the object and towards dialectical-pictorial propositions, a process which we note here and outline only in general terms, since a deeper analysis is beyond our scope. There can be no other reason for Dias' tremendous influence over the majority of artists which appeared subsequently. Elsewhere, I intend to carry out an indepth and detailed analysis of his work, but I want to note here, in this overview, that his work is really a decisive point in the formulation of the very concept of "New Objectivity" which I would later come to render concrete – the depth and seriousness of his lines of action have not yet exhausted their consequences: they are only in the bud'. See Oiticica 1967 (see 'Item 2', s. n.); Oiticica 1997c, pp. 111–12; Oiticica 2011c, p. 90 (English translation: p. 228).

32 See image in Dias 2009, p. 81, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#82](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#82).



Janeiro, newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, 26 June 1966), which concerned Hélio's work in honour of his friend Cara de Cavalo [Horse Face]. Mário Pedrosa remarked, on Hélio Oiticica's actions:

[His] behavior suddenly changed: one day, he left his ivory tower – his studio – to become part of the Estação Primeira, where his painful and serious popular initiation took place at the foot of Mangueira Hill, a *carioca* myth.<sup>33</sup>

Let us now see how Hélio himself recounted this passage, when he recalled it in 1968, as he discussed *Tropicália*,<sup>34</sup> from the previous year. Oiticica made a link between the two moments: that of 1967, when he made *Tropicália*; and that of 1964, when he departed from Neo-Concretism, as Pedrosa noted in the text just cited. At that time, Hélio said:

Everything began with the formulation of the *Parangolé* in 1964,<sup>35</sup> with all my experience with the samba, with the discovery of the *Morros* [hills], of the organic architecture of Rio's *favelas* [slums] (and consequently of others, such as the *palafitas* [riverside shacks] on stilts of the state of Amazonas), and principally of the spontaneous, anonymous constructions in the great urban centres – the art of the streets, of unfinished things,<sup>36</sup> of vacant lots, etc.<sup>37</sup>

One cannot but conclude that an ensemble of decisive stances and choices constitute the whole ethical-political-aesthetical response of Hélio Oiticica to the coup of 1964. Thus, as mentioned in the statement text 'Tropicália', such a response embraces all of these aspects: the aforementioned journey into the popular Mangueira neighbourhood involving the 'initiation' into the samba

33 See Pedrosa 1981e, p. 207; 1998g, p. 356; English translation: Pedrosa 2015g, p. 314.

34 See the image of the original installation *Tropicália* [*Tropicália*, 1967], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66335/tropicalia>. See also the image of a new presentation in 2011 of *Tropicália* at the Museu Histórico do Estado do Pará (Belém): <http://u-in-u.com/magazine/articles/2013/helio-oiticica/photos/06/>.

35 See images of Oiticica's 'Genesis of the Parangolés series' ('Foto de Rua / Gênese do Parangolé, 1964'), by photographer Desdemone Bardin in Ramírez 2007, p. 374; see also, for a Parangolé from 1965, p. 375.

36 See images of Oiticica's B 38 *Can Bólido 01 – Appropriation 02 'Consumitive'* (B 38 *Bólido Lata 01 – Apropriação 02 'Consumitive'*, 1966), in Ramírez 2007, p. 116.

37 See Oiticica 1997e, p. 124; 2011e, p. 108.

and into the *Morros* [hills] way of life; the discovery of a new ‘constructive reason’ – elaborated from ‘the art of the streets, unfinished things, vacant lots, etc.’ – the genesis of a non-analytical but synthetical ‘environmental’ programme – as will be discussed later; and the imposition of an ‘obviously “Brazilian” image upon the current context of the avant-garde and the national art manifestations in general.’<sup>38</sup>

### To Africanise Brazil

In addition to a ‘new constructive reason’, appropriated from the streets and from people’s collective life as a mode of resistance, Oiticica’s response also involved a practice of direct action: the *occupation* of the Museum of Modern Art (MAM), in Rio de Janeiro (RJ), by people from the *morros* [hills], that is, mostly by Afro-Brazilians.<sup>39</sup> Without going into details about the night in which Oiticica, alongside friends from the Morro da Mangueira [Mangueira Hill], were denied entrance to a gala opening of the exhibition *Opinion 65* [*Opinião 65*] on 12 August 1965 at the MAM-RJ, it is crucial to include this episode in Oiticica’s strategic and emphatic answer to the coup in 1964.

In short, Oiticica’s response – that is, in the event, his intervention at the exhibition’s opening and as an objective act in favour of a real and true Brazilian new figuration, according to the title of the exhibition *New Figuration* [*Nova Figuração*], i.e. stressing the urgency of such a demand – chiefly consisted in calling for the end of the *apartheid* in the Brazilian fine arts, as well as for the revolutionary cultural appropriation of Brazil by the descendants of African people.<sup>40</sup>

It can be said that his work thereafter began to constitute itself programmatically according to the rhythm of the concrete unfoldings of the new alliance,

38 For quotations, just mentioned, see note 37 above.

39 See images by Desdemone Bardin: Miro da Mangueira with *Parangolé P 02, Flag 1* [*Parangolé P 02, Bandeira 1* 1964], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66322/parangole-p2-bandeira-1>; Jerônimo da Mangueira with *Parangolé P 06, Cape 3, Homage to Mário Pedrosa* [*Parangolé P 06, Capa 3, Homenagem a Mário Pedrosa*, 1965], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66321/parangole-p6-capa-3-parangole-p6-capa-3-homenagem-a-mario-pedrosa>; and Roseni performing with *P 07 Parangolé Cape 04 “Clark”* [*P 07 Parangolé Capa 04 “Clark”*, 1965], at: [http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/helio\\_oiticica\\_p07\\_parangole\\_cape.jpg](http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/helio_oiticica_p07_parangole_cape.jpg). For several Parangolés’ images, see also Ramírez 2007, pp. 299–318.

40 Oiticica 1997e, pp. 124–6; Oiticica 2011e, pp. 108–10 (English translation: pp. 237–9).

whose rite of passage comprised this attempt to take over on the exhibition's opening night.

The shift away from geometry, white skin, and glossy and ascetic planes and surfaces,<sup>41</sup> and toward samba, black skin, and the many colours of popular fabrics – foregrounded in *Tropicália* – in relation to the programmatic axis of avant-garde art in Brazil was also placed in historical perspective in the aforementioned text by Mário Pedrosa.

### Antiart or the End of Modern Art (Pedrosa)

What were the socio-historical conditions and the specific context surrounding the Brazilian artistic avant-garde? Conditions that objectively enabled Dias's work to exert a 'pictorial-structural' and 'pictorial-dialectical' function in favour of the 'decisive' turning point into realism, as was the case, according to Oiticica.<sup>42</sup>

One of Mário Pedrosa's texts is very telling in this regard. Its words bring not only the clarity of the power of synthesis and historical judgment of the critic, but also an accumulation of reflexive work and historical truths. These were elaborated in Oiticica's post-geometric works. As noted at the outset, from the mid-1970s onwards, these elements were repressed in Brazilian art circles on account of the malaise (in relation to realism). Thus, let us now turn to Pedrosa's words, which illuminate antecedents and developments of the synthesis which resulted in the New Brazilian Objectivity and its new constructive reason:

Now that we have arrived at the end of what has been called 'modern art,' inaugurated by [Pablo Picasso's] *Les Femmes d'Alger*, and inspired by the (then) recent discovery of African art, criteria for appreciation are no longer the same as the ones established since then, based as they were on the Cubist experiment. By now, we have entered another cycle, one that is no longer purely artistic, but cultural, radically different from the preceding one and begun (shall we say?) by Pop art. I would call this new cycle of antiart 'postmodern art.'

41 See image of Sérgio Camargo, *Untitled* (1969) at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra34981/sem-titulo>.

42 See Oiticica 1967 (see 'Item 2,' s. n.); 1997c, p. 112; 2011c, p. 90 (English translation: p. 228).

(In passing, let us say that, this time around, Brazil participates not as a modest follower, but as a leader. In many regards, the young exponents of the old Concretism and especially of Neo-Concretism ... have foreshadowed the Op and even Pop art movements ...)

In the apprenticeship phase and in the exercise of 'modern art,' the natural virtuality, the extreme plasticity of perception of the new being explored by the artists was subordinated, disciplined, and contained by the exaltation and the hegemony of intrinsically formal values. Nowadays, in this phase of art in the situation of antiart, of 'postmodern art,' the reverse takes place: formal values per se tend to be absorbed by the malleability of perceptive and situational structures. As a psychological phenomenon, it is perfectly clear that the malleability of perception increases under the influence of emotion and affective states. ... Expressiveness in itself is of no interest to the contemporary avant-garde. On the contrary, it fears hermetic individual subjectivism most of all ...

... But his behavior suddenly changed: one day, he left his ivory tower – his studio – to become part of the Estação Primeira, where his painful and serious popular initiation took place<sup>43</sup> ...

Oiticica called his art environmental. Indeed, that is what it is. Nothing about it is isolated. There is no single artwork that can be appreciated in itself, like a picture.

The sensorial perceptual whole dominates. ... It was during his initiation in samba that the artist moved from the purity of visual experience to an experiment in touch, in movement, in the sensual fruition of materials in which the entire body – previously reduced in the distant aristocracy of visibility – makes its entrance as a total source of sensoriality. ...

... For the first time, the artist finds himself face to face with another reality – the world of awareness, of states of mind, the world of values. All things must now accommodate meaningful behavior. ... The symbiosis of this extreme, radical aesthetic refinement therefore takes place with an extreme psychological radicalism that involves the entire personality. The Luciferian sin of aesthetic nonconformity and the individual sin of psychological nonconformity are fused. The mediator of this symbiosis of two Manichaeian nonconformisms was the Mangueira samba school.

The expression of this absolute nonconformity is his *Homenagem a 'Cara de Cavalo'* [Tribute to 'Horse Face'], a veritable monument of au-

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43 This paragraph was earlier quoted. See note 34.

thetically pathetic beauty in which formal values are finally not supreme. An open box without a lid, modestly covered by mesh that must be lifted to reveal the bottom, its inner walls are lined with reproductions of a photograph that appeared in the newspapers of the day; in them, [the outlaw] 'Cara de Cavalo' appears lying on the ground, his face riddled with bullets, his arms open, as if crucified.<sup>44</sup> ... Beauty, sin, outrage, and love give this young man's art an emphasis that is new to Brazilian art. There is no point in moral reprimands. If you are looking for a precedent, perhaps it is this: Hélio is the grandson of an anarchist.<sup>45</sup>

### From the Analytic (or Laboratory) Phase to the Construction of the Environmental (or Realist) Synthesis

Pedrosa's text, one might say, attests to the consolidation of the Brazilian visual system in its transition from modern to 'postmodern' art, according to Pedrosa's previous understanding, in 1966, of the latter notion – quite different from its subsequent meaning in the Western antimodernist polemics of the 1980s and 1990s. And this consolidation is completed precisely around the new synthetic-realist paradigm that – alongside Dias's constitutive steps in the context of New Figuration – has as its corollary Helio Oiticica's change of course to realism and environmental art.

Oiticica was fully aware of what was at stake and highlighted the unprecedented and decisive direction of this moment in the text 'Tropicália' from March 1968, cited above.<sup>46</sup> The constitution of the new synthetic and realist vector, surpassing the formative function of the analytical vector's plastic or formal values, exercised between 1950 and 1964, came from the idea of Parangolé,

44 See photo of Oiticica lifting the veil and showing the work *B 33 Bolide Box 18, Poem Box 2, Tribute to 'Horse Face'* [*B 33 Bólido Caixa 18, Poema Caixa 2, Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo*, 1966], described by Pedrosa in Pedrosa 2015g, p. 315, available at: [https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/publication\\_pdf/3232/Pedrosa\\_PREVIEW.pdf?1456334850](https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/publication_pdf/3232/Pedrosa_PREVIEW.pdf?1456334850). See also Ramírez 2007, p. 380.

45 See Pedrosa 1981e, pp. 205–9; 1998g, pp. 355–60; English translation: Pedrosa 2015g, pp. 314–17 (see note above for the link).

46 According to Oiticica, as quoted earlier, 'Tropicália is the very first conscious, objective attempt to impose an obviously Brazilian image upon the current context of the avant-garde and national art manifestations in general'. See Oiticica 1997e, p. 124; Oiticica 2011e, p. 108 (English translation: p. 237).

as Oiticica emphasised in 'Fundamental Bases for a Definition of Parangolé' (November 1964).<sup>47</sup>

### The 'Pictorial-Plastic-Structural' Turning Point of Dias

Thus, having schematised Oiticica's trajectory from the formative analytical phase to the consolidation of the Brazilian visual system in a synthetic and realistic key, we now need to take a further step, namely to determine the decisive moment of such an achievement. That is, the reconstitution of the practical and reflexive path followed by the other matrix-form, given by Dias's works, toward such ends.

Such a matrix was described by Oiticica himself as 'a decisive point in the formulation of the actual concept of "New Objectivity"'. As such, it is a question of explaining how the new conception of a 'dialectic-pictorial' structure was engendered through Dias's work in the New Figuration and especially in the paradigmatic work *Note on the Unforeseen Death* [*Nota sobre a Morte Imprevista*, 1965].<sup>48</sup>

### Marx Seminar

It is time to re-establish the apparent incongruity of Dias's language on a new basis. That is, alongside Oiticica's initiation process into samba, and besides the latter's survey of what constitutes the popular constructive mode. In short, we need to clarify the reasons or the whimsical mixture of heterogeneous elements that, from the pictorial-structural viewpoint, were so decisive, according to Oiticica, in the constitution of the constructive reason of New Objectivity. So, what was the truth of such a heterogeneous and surprising combination in relation to the new general rhythm?

47 See images of Oiticica's 'Genesis of the Parangolés series' ['Foto de Rua / Gênese do Parangolé, 1964'], by photographer Desdemone Bardin in Ramírez 2007, p. 374.

See Oiticica 1967 ('Item 2', s. n.); Oiticica 1997c, pp. 111–12; Oiticica 2011c, pp. 90–1 (English translation: p. 228). See also image of Dias's *Note on the Unforeseen Death* in Dias 2009, p. 81, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#82](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#82).

48 See Oiticica 1967 ('Item 2', s. n.); Oiticica 1997c, pp. 111–12; Oiticica 2011c, pp. 90–1 (English translation: p. 228). See also image of Dias's *Note on the Unforeseen Death* in Dias 2009, p. 81, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#82](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#82).

For this new investigative stage, I will resort to a memorial essay by Roberto Schwarz, entitled 'Marx Seminar' ['Um Seminário Marx'], which, in 1995, recalled from another angle the decisive rupture introduced by the 1964 coup. The essay examines a number of discussions in which Schwarz participated from the late 1950s to the pre-1964 moment.

This 1995 essay was written about 25 years after the other essay by the same author: 'Culture and Politics in Brazil, 1964–1969', a text that had to be published in *Les Temps Modernes* (Paris) due to the censorship in Brazil at the time.<sup>49</sup>

From the current perspective, both texts complement one another and benefit from being read side by side. In fact, the issues they address are inter-linked and correspond to contiguous historical moments. Thus, 'Marx Seminar' is an investigation into the origins and antecedents of the contradictions studied in 'Culture and Politics ...' – which analyses the great cultural, critical, and inventive effervescence of the period following the coup, in which emerged the crisis of geometric abstraction and the visual responses we are now revisiting.

What does Schwarz say in his essay? The text discusses a seminar about *Capital* by members of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of São Paulo, from 1958 onwards.<sup>50</sup> From this seminar, which combined an examination of the ongoing process of industrial modernisation with that of the reproduction of colonial relations, many new questions have arisen substantiating important university theses on the structure of problems in Brazil's economic and social formation. However, the debates held at the Seminar also highlighted 'blind spots', which are spelled out in Schwarz's 1995 essay. These blind spots did not just affect the course of the Seminar, as Schwarz explains; they were also reproduced through the impasses and limits of Brazilian debates and progressive intellectual production during the late 1950s and in subsequent years.

What matters here is that such blind spots in the humanities were also extended to what occurred in the visual arts, gravitating at that time towards

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49 See footnote 7.

50 The Marx Seminar was organised by a group of young University of São Paulo-USP teachers and students who gathered weekly, outside the university, to study and discuss Marx's *Capital*. In the interdisciplinary group, composed of members of the courses of History, Languages, Social and Political Sciences, and Philosophy, there were several intellectuals whose works came to change how the country was seen: Bento Prado Júnior, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Fernando Novais, José Arthur Giannotti, Francisco Weffort, Michael Löwy, Octávio Ianni, Paul Singer, Roberto Schwarz and others. See Schwarz 1999e, pp. 86–105.

the paradigm of geometric abstraction, as noted previously. What, then, were the blind spots that Schwarz identified?

The essay points to three in particular: 1) disregard 'of Marx's criticism of the fetishism of commodities'; 2) incomprehension of Brazilian intellectuals with regard to the pessimistic Marxism of the Frankfurt School and related thinkers – that is, incomprehension before the critique of industrialisation and progress; 3) neglect of modern art.

As Schwarz stresses, this occurred in favour of the imperative to 'catch up and overcome the backwardness' of Brazil in relation to 'advanced countries' (the latter, at that time, were viewed as parameters for Brazilian development). In brief, the intellectuals of the Marx Seminar generally upheld the thesis of modernisation based on industrialisation, according to the standard of planning theorised and implemented by Celso Furtado, in line with the model advocated by the UNECLAC (CEPAL). Thus, on another level, such a model of modernisation through industrialisation was similarly reflected in the visual arts by the defenders of geometric abstraction – also prophets, in their own way, of industrialisation.<sup>51</sup>

In this resided the mental provincialism of the time, which Schwarz's criticism described as a 'narrowness of vision' about the 'national problematique'. Accordingly, the latter was then formulated independently of an accurate and critical examination of the world system of commodity production and its implications.<sup>52</sup>

### Blind Spots and Dilemmas of Developmentalism

Schwarz's comments are sharp and productive. Having made some adjustments, one can transport them from the human sciences into the arts. Concrete art was part of the culture of 'developmentalism' and thus shared the optimism of industrialisation. It ignored issues like labour alienation and the fetishism of the commodity, leaving untouched the essential terms of the aesthetic experience. That is, it neglected power relations, the foundations of the author/work/public<sup>53</sup> economy – something that would be insistently dissected by Dias's subsequent works in the 1970s, through the series *The Illustration of Art*.

51 For the first in-depth critiques, including a concrete class analysis, of the model proposed by UNECLAC (CEPAL), see Marini 1969; 2012. See also Chapter 3, in this volume.

52 For the 'steps ahead', see Schwarz 1999e, pp. 93–103; for the 'blind spots', see pp. 103–5.

53 See Chapter 3, in this volume.



Neo-Concretism partially shifted the coordinates of these relations and indeed modified them. However, it did so imbued with a historical optimism similar to that of Concrete Art. Thus, Neo-Concretism focused primarily on the question of plastic or formal values defined from the viewpoint of Brazilian interpretations of Weberian rationalism. That is, in the abstract, transcendental and supposedly universalist terms disseminated by the Ulm school in the wake of Concrete Parisian art in 1930. This programme, by Van Doesburg, had created its own version, domesticated by capitalism, substantially transforming the aims of the vivid and politically committed Soviet Constructivism originating from the October Revolution.

In short, the meek version of Constructivism adopted by the middle-class avant-garde of São Paulo, agglutinated around the programme of Concrete Art, obeyed the principles of specialisation and the division of knowledge, and did not interact with other sectors of Brazilian cultural life, except those directly involved in industrialisation and technological modernisation of production.<sup>54</sup>

In view of such a critical overview, what is to be done? Well, precisely what the New Figuration started to do. First: revive the combative dimension of geometric abstraction, going to its roots: the October Revolution's Constructivism. This was explicitly present in Dias's work – through the aggressiveness characteristic of *agitprop* and its associated chromatic reduction, in the utilitarian line of Soviet constructivist posters, and also through ostensible discontinuity, etc.

Second: to abandon the castle of purity of the research of aesthetic values, to end the isolation from other languages and to let oneself be dialogically permeated by other manifestations. This was what led to the recovery of elements of the vulgar or popular visual universe, among other things.<sup>55</sup> These elements gave Dias's work an expressionist tone, typical of caricature and vulgar comments on public bathroom walls, of easily readable features, typical of the melodramatic and charged rhetoric of sensationalist mass journalism.

Third: to address the related issues of commodity fetishism and of the alienation and internationalisation of the worldwide commodity-producing system. This is what the New Figuration did in numerous ways,<sup>56</sup> by publicly attacking the imagery of consumption and by appropriating to this end the clichés of Pop art. I will return to this point later.

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54 On this debate, see Chapter 3, in this volume.

55 See image of Antonio Dias, *Solitary* [*Solitário*, 1967], in Dias 2009, p. 135, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#136](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#136).

56 See image of Antonio Dias, *My Portrait* [*O Meu Retrato*, 1967], in Dias 2009, p. 44, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#46](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#46).

## Counterspell

As a consequence, the New Figuration made the critical and expressive discovery of a problematique that until then was not identified in the panorama of national ideas: the paraphernalia of fantasies related to the 'fetishism of the commodity', neglected by the previous intellectual generation – despite the fact that people in Brazil had already experienced around two decades of accelerated industrialisation and urbanisation.

The installation of a consumption culture in Brazil had ostensibly changed the lifestyle of influential groups of the urban middle strata<sup>57</sup> and created a set of new phantasmagoria. The military dictatorship managed to intensify industrialisation and promote consumption, contrary to the hopes of many proponents of 'developmentalism' – who assumed that the industrialisation-and-democracy binomial was indivisible.<sup>58</sup>

In short, the New Figuration was able to predict such a phenomenon and make it visible. Thus – even before the dictatorship achieved its modernising and developmental economic surge in the Médici years (1969–74) of the so-called 'Brazilian miracle' – the New Figuration harshly criticised the latent desires and imaginary clichés of the owning classes, which demanded and supported the coup.

Hence the timeliness and explosive effects of the montages by Dias and others on national cultural life. In the new national scene – in which the adversary to be vanquished was not only imperialism, as the nationalists supposed, but was much closer, in the guise of class enemies – the question of the use of Pop art was strategic and constituted a crucial finding of the New Figuration.

Why was this appropriation necessary? Without the global and systematised reflection developed in the terms of international capitalism, there could be no real understanding of the correlation and power play that promoted the military coup and put an end to the illusion of the democratic-developmental spring.

Hence New Figuration's view of Pop art as an emblem of the central perspective. In 1964, this perspective was the dominant artistic paradigm of the new international centre of the visual arts: the USA. If internationalisation of

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57 For the difference between the modernisation of lifestyle and productive development, and on the articulation in economic policies of the dictatorship between technical progress and increases in productivity, economic growth, income concentration and social inequality, see Furtado 1992, pp. 45–7.

58 See Schwarz 2003a, p. 19; English translation: Schwarz 2003b, pp. 37–8.

the terms became necessary, it did not happen as a mere loan from the metropolis to the satellite colony, as was the case in relation to the Parisian programme of Concrete Art, passively assimilated by the Ruptura group, and then by local Concrete artists.

### Kidnapping

The programme of decolonisation and struggle against imperialism, as well as the class debate, had become radicalised and accelerated in response to the military coup of 1964. The role of the propertied classes in the coup was established. Hence Dias's works, in relation to Pop art, did not passively assimilate – which undoubtedly occurred in some ambiguous and hesitant works of other artists at that time. In fact, Dias devised an aggressive appropriation: he operated a 'kidnapping'. Therefore, the struggle was transferred to another terrain. The nationalist combative strategy was replaced with an international one.

Thus, Dias resorted to Pop art, which was linked to the imagery of consumption, but also to forms of cultural imagery strange to it: the popular culture of comic books, bathrooms and buses, graffiti and caricatures, and remnants from the language of the October Revolution. Both languages were used as negative operations and twists; in short, as physical blows against Pop art.

The high degree of violence inherent in Dias's work came from this constitution, based on the abduction of opposing forces. In 1967, Mário Pedrosa would say that the only purism of Dias was that of 'naked violence'.<sup>59</sup> In fact, the theme of violence – sometimes legitimate, sometimes not – was constant during that period. In 1969, Oiticica would likewise affirm, in the text accompanying the presentation of the *bólido* [bolide] in homage to Cara de Cavalo [Horse Face] at the Whitechapel Gallery in London: 'violence is justified as a revolt means, but never as an oppressive one'.<sup>60</sup>

In this sense, it can be affirmed that Dias kidnapped Pop art, which was appropriated, devoured and swallowed up, if I may insist, by a new 'cannibal' – to recall the terms of the 'Cannibalist Manifesto' ['Manifesto Antropófago', 1928], by modernist writer Oswald de Andrade. In fact, Oiticica referred to

59 Pedrosa 1981f, p. 220; Pedrosa 1998h, p. 370; English translation: Pedrosa 2015h, p. 322.

60 See the *Whitechapel Experiment* catalogue: Oiticica 1969, p. 8, facsimile in Oiticica 2007, pp. 97–136 (text on p. 104). See also Oiticica 1997g, p. 25. For images of Oiticica's *B 33 Bolide Box 18, Poem Box 2, Tribute to 'Horse Face'* (1969), see Oiticica 1969, pp. 9–11, facsimile in Oiticica 2007, pp. 105–7.

the New Brazilian Objectivity as a 'Super Anthropophagy'.<sup>61</sup> The 'Super Anthropophagus or Cannibal', of New Objectivity, in this case, carried the cutting and montage weapons developed by Soviet avant-garde art. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the operation of turning Pop art inside out, today seen in historical perspective, somehow presaged the kidnapping, in September 1969, of the United States ambassador Charles Elbrick by the joint command of the National Liberation Alliance [Aliança Libertadora Nacional (ALN)] and of the Revolutionary Movement 8th October [Movimento Revolucionário 8 de Outubro (MR-8)].

Pop clichés, normally associated with the standardised euphoria of USA consumption and power, were recycled by Dias with ostentatious sarcasm, like a captured trophy, and, in this condition, they were explicitly associated with signs of death. However, things did not end there in the manner of an act of counterpropaganda; rather, they actually started on the basis of kidnapping. What did these tactics entail?

In the first place, the kidnapping of Pop art did not begin as an idealised self-projection, as was the case in geometric abstraction. This narcissistic projection motivated Lygia Clark, in a 1957 note, to critically observe that, in Concrete Art, the self surrendered to a 'false way of dominating space'.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, unlike the idealised self-projection of the 'Concretists' and, in phenomenological terms, also that of the Neo-Concretist group, the kidnapping of Pop art began with a historical judgement of the contemporary world. Second, one can deduce that the kidnapping occurred because the author conceived of their artistic practices no longer as part of transcendental mastery or as something separate. A mastery thus presumably endowed with the exemplarity of a universal ethical-cognitive model, as intended by geometric trends.

In short, art was redefined, after the kidnapping of Pop art, as a handling of symbolic operations, implanted as a counter-discourse considered as a combat operation. In this perspective, art participated in a set of strategic actions, inseparable from power struggles. What was actually in dispute? What were the targets?

61 See Oiticica 1967 ('Item 1'); Oiticica 1997c, p. 111; Oiticica 2011c, p. 88 (English translation: p. 227).

62 The note is dated 1957, that is, two years before the first manifesto of the Neo-Concrete movement. *Apud* Pedrosa 1981d, p. 197 (English translation: Pedrosa 2015f, p. 300).

## Peripheral Economies

The materials were explicitly diversified.<sup>63</sup> All works from the New Figuration cycle emphasised discontinuities and heterogeneities at various levels. All of Dias's objects were scrutinised and subdivided into many parts according to regulations or logics that divided the artistic procedures according to sectors. Thus, the visual territory defined in his objects was fractioned into 'colonies'<sup>64</sup> – and this aroused, in the terms of the Brazilian artistic avant-garde, a clear contrast with the transcendental unity of the procedures of Neo-Concrete art. The latter, in one way or another – and in spite of its dissonance and dissent – implied the purity of plastic or formal values and classic aesthetic principles to extract, in a negative mode, all its significance.

Disintegration of the plastic nature or of the aesthetic unity of the work, obscure rules, confined procedures and conducts ...<sup>65</sup> Would these operations have anything to do with the experience of arbitrariness and defeat of the project of national unity and autonomy?

The fact is that the observer encountered a seemingly confused and illogical state of affairs, which was, however, intuitively familiar and recognisable.<sup>66</sup> In what terms? How close was such a state to aspects of the general experience?

To recapitulate: the observance of the sectorial logics that allotted the work; the resorting to industrial materials and procedures; the separation of the whole and disorder introduced even in traditional artisanal practices.<sup>67</sup> Where was this mix to be found, except in the practices and transactions in which a mode of disqualification of work that felt like slavery appeared in tandem with the advanced techniques and models transplanted from central economies?

63 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Oppressor / Oppressed* [*Opressor / Oprimido*, 1968], in Dias 2009, p. 135, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#136](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#136). See also note 3 above, for other works with a heterogeneity of materials.

64 See image of Antonio Dias, *I Still Look, I Still Talk* [*Ainda Olho, ainda Falo*, 1966], in Dias 2009, p. 70, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#72](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#72).

65 See image of Antonio Dias, *In my Garden* [*Dans mon Jardin*, 1967 (original title in French)], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra12218/no-meu-jardim>.

66 See image of Antonio Dias, *Self-Portrait for the Counterattack* [*Auto-retrato para o contra-ataque*, 1966], in Dias 2009, p. 74, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#76](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#76).

67 See image of Antonio Dias, *Note on the Unforeseen Death* [*Nota sobre a Morte Imprevista*, 1965] in Dias 2009, p. 81, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#82](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#82).

In the end, Dias's language, in its *objective form*,<sup>68</sup> synthesised the heterogeneous rhythm of the uneven practices of peripheral economies. It proposed a reduction or an aesthetic formalisation of the symptomatic of imbalances, typical of the processes of accelerated productive *modernisation* in *underdeveloped* economies, whose development within underdevelopment intensified social heterogeneity and intrinsic inequalities.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, what Oiticica would refer to, in the 'Tropicália' text of March 1968,<sup>70</sup> as the need 'to impose an obviously Brazilian image upon the current context of the avant-garde and national art manifestations in general',<sup>71</sup> could be understood as an advancement of the findings of Dias's poetics, which, in the objectivity of art, exposed from 1964–5 the evils of *underdevelopment*. In fact, I recall and insist, Oiticica himself noted the importance of Dias's work as 'a decisive point in the formulation of the actual concept of New Objectivity'.<sup>72</sup> Let us scrutinise, then, in what consists such novelty, brought about by the young Dias.

### Asymmetric Experiences

Between the opposite sides of the aesthetic experience, that is, between the observer and the artwork, in the terms of Dias's works, intransitivity, opacity and asymmetry were made explicit. Thus, at first sight, such explicitness, so *unevenly* present<sup>73</sup> in the instance of reception of Dias's works, suggested a parallel with the heterogeneous and dual order of *underdevelopment*. Therefore, in this way, the dynamics of the aesthetic experience worked, from the beginning, as a charade and economy of frustration in Dias's constructions. The works

68 For the notion of 'objective form', see Candido 2004a, pp. 28, 38; English translation in Candido 2014a, pp. 79–103. For Schwarz's comments on the subject, see Schwarz 1987a, pp. 129–55, especially p. 142; an English translation of Schwarz on Candido is available: Schwarz 2012. See also Schwarz 1999c, pp. 24–45, especially, pp. 28, 30–1 (for the notion of substance), 35–6, 41.

69 See Furtado 1979, pp. 39–45.

70 See image of Oiticica's *Tropicália* (1967), in Oiticica 1969, p. 20, facsimile in Oiticica 2007, p. 116.

71 See notes 11 and 46.

72 See Oiticica 1967 ('Item 2', s. n.); Oiticica 1997c, pp. 112; Oiticica 2011c, p. 90 (English translation: p. 228).

73 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Oppressor / Oppressed* [*Opressor / Oprimido*, 1968], in Dias 2009, p. 135, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#136](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#136).

laid traps and proposed simulations of pleasure and then frustrated their own promises.<sup>74</sup> A series of works from the New Figuration cycle offered encounters that evoked a projective relation or a relation of narcissistic identification as a parodic reference to the relation between the subject of aesthetic observation and the visual object.<sup>75</sup> This interplay, the promises of the image, title, etc., would always result in mismatches, in non-reciprocal or opaque relations. There are many examples of this within Dias's works: *Dear, Are You Alright?* [*Querida, Você Está Bem?*, 1964]; *Heart to Crush* [*Coração para Amassar*, 1966];<sup>76</sup> *Solitary* [*Solitário*, 1967];<sup>77</sup> *Trip/ Tripe* [*Trip/ Tripe*, 1968]; *Black Mirror* [*Black Mirror*, 1968];<sup>78</sup> *The Art of Transference/ I Love You* (1972).<sup>79</sup>

But why entice, only to then cause mismatches? Why attack the imagination of the observer so intently? What was the political economy of such induced frustration? The operation implied a critical-reflective strategy, following in the footsteps of Brecht and Benjamin, who proposed to complement the images with captions,<sup>80</sup> against the domination of the imaginary by power. This became common practice throughout Dias's career and was noted early on by Pedrosa.<sup>81</sup>

In these terms, intransitivity and opacity constitute momentary experiences, provided that the observer transcends the stage of the visible in search of other structures of intelligibility. In effect, all of Dias's stratagems imply the construction of a critical visual ruse involving all parties: the observer and the work and simultaneously the conjugation of a historical analysis of the whole.

The narcissistic fusion between the observer and the image, or analogously, on another plane, transcendental contemplation and the associated presumption of immediacy and autonomy of vision, had been detected and mocked since the New Figuration. But to what end?

74 See image of Antonio Dias, *Heart to Crush* [*Coração para Amassar*, 1966], in Dias 2009, p. 71, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#72](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#72).

75 See image of Dias, *The Bond: Me and You* [*O Laço: Eu e Você*, 1965], at: <http://www.nararoesler.com.br/artists/33-antonio-dias/>, slide number 15.

76 See image in Dias 2009, p. 71, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#72](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#72).

77 See image in Dias 2009, p. 135, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#136](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#136).

78 See image at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66222/black-mirror>.

79 See image in Dias 2009, p. 119, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#120](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#120).

80 See Benjamin 1985, p. 107.

81 See Pedrosa 1981f, p. 220; Pedrosa 1998h, p. 370; English translation: Pedrosa 2015h, p. 322.

Dias's constructions moved provocatively against the current pattern of regressive pleasure – which the consumer seeks in the image of the commodity object, or similarly, in front of the mirror. Was this the pedagogy of an '*enragé*'? In 1967, Mário Pedrosa affirmed that Dias was 'permanently condemned to never finding peace'.<sup>82</sup> In the process of observation thus unleashed, the observer had no way of finding peace or satisfaction.

In fact, the issues of intransitivity, asymmetry, and opacity – or gratifications as traps – continued to preoccupy Dias and would recur over the years in many of his works. An example can be found in an object-picture consisting of mirror pieces, *The Art of Transference/I Love You* (1972),<sup>83</sup> which ironically spells out to the viewer: 'I Love You ...' – even before the latter proposes to do so, as is usually the case in the sphere of art lovers.

### Cutting Participation

Stripped of the enjoyment of the *happy end*,<sup>84</sup> the observer thus underwent an intensive training based on shocks against his projective feelings of identification. In short, against the pervasive monopoly of amusement and the industry of identification, which creates fictitious palaces for the masses, Dias reworked and readjusted the critical and political dimension of *participation* in the aesthetic experience. Let us scrutinise the magnitude of such a critical operation in relation to the mode of reception set by the Neo-Concrete group as *participation*.

Recall that by incorporating the problematic of the subject of reception, Neo-Concretism – in its specific and inherent density – certainly gave greater truth and structural complexity to the geometrical poetics of Concrete art. Thus, the Neo-Concrete idea of *participation* constituted a sort of expressionism of the subject of reception,<sup>85</sup> 'thrown into the work', in the words of Lygia

82 See Pedrosa 1981f, p. 221; Pedrosa 1998h, p. 372; English translation: Pedrosa 2015h, p. 323.

83 See image in Dias 2009, p. 119, at: [https://www.daros-latinoamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#120](https://www.daros-latinoamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#120).

84 See image of *Black Mirror* (1968) at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66222/black-mirror>.

85 See image of Lygia Clark, *Climber n. 3* [*Trepante n. 3*, 1965], at: <https://www.mfah.org/art/detail/75904?returnUrl=%2Fart%2Fsearch%3Fnationality%3DBrazilian%26artist%3DLYgia%2BClark>. See also images of Clark's *Critters* [*Bichos*], at: [http://press.moma.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/lygiaclarkchecklistupdated5.14.14.pdf](http://press.moma.org/wp-content/files_mf/lygiaclarkchecklistupdated5.14.14.pdf), pp. 43–7.



Clark,<sup>86</sup> to experience, as a protagonist, all the spatial possibilities of the work and to refer such experience to the supposed plenitude of being. But the fact is that the danger of the compensatory outpouring in the mystery of being, in what one of the founding fathers of phenomenology called the ‘field of eternal presence’, surrounded the footsteps of *participation*, placed in the strict and exclusive realm of aesthetic experience, regardless of social and historical pressures or class conflict.<sup>87</sup>

Such a contradiction became evident after the coup, when the seduction of consumption was converted into the matrix of the new authoritarian social order, and the elegantly modern poetics of Neo-Concretism – although generous and imbued with an aspiration to universality – proved insufficient to lead the struggle of resistance against the dictatorship. Thus, in the new historical framework, of social and political conflicts exasperated by the 1964 civil-military coup – which obstructed democratic developmentalism – a new mode of *participation* became necessary.

After the transition, as mentioned, through the New Figuration [Nova Figuração], the New Objectivity, which comprised a new concept of *participation*, was the direct response of the most advanced Neo-Concretist and Concretist artists to the new challenges, posed by a deep understanding of reality’s complexity.

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86 Apud Pedrosa 1998f, p. 350; see also Pedrosa 1981d, pp. 197–203; English translation: Pedrosa 2015f, p. 300.

87 Husserl, *apud* Pedrosa 1998f, p. 350. In this article, published in the ‘Suplemento Literário’ [‘Literary Supplement’] of the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo, 28 December 1963) in which the critic explained to the public of São Paulo the artist’s journey (leaving the ‘plane’, going through the ‘critters’ and to the idea of ‘participation’, to Moebius strip experiments and then the so-called ‘soft works’), Pedrosa – while maintaining his sympathy and poetic enthusiasm for the process – did not hide his critical reflection, scepticism and reservations towards Lygia Clark’s aesthetic assumptions: ‘what kind of “architecture” is this? It is the primal architecture ... the shell, the shelter of the first critter or of the first man ... In that place occurs the mystery of what the artist herself defined as “the mystique of contemporary man, the inauguration of the moment, like a cosmological longing”. Reaching “the inside-out of space”, as Focillon wanted, she intends to establish the experience of the inside without discontinuity with the experience of the outside ... In Lygia’s “shelters”, past and future meet in one moment, that is, in the thickness of the present, whose privilege is, according to Husserl, being the zone where being and consciousness are but one. Her work is thus a pathetic and naive but eminently contemporary effort to reach and remain in what could be classified as a “primordial dimension”’. See Pedrosa 1998f, p. 354.

### At the Dialogical Heart of the New Synthesis

Having established the two paths and their matrix forms, which converged and resulted in the scheme of the new synthesis, in order to better understand it and to define its meaning in the larger arc of the historical process, let us now try to summarise and unify in a historical perspective the decisive elements of the new constructive reason. As we have seen, both Pedrosa and Oiticica attributed to this realisation a global significance, emphasising its independence and originality. Accordingly, they confronted the new poetic synthesis obtained here, in the form of the New Brazilian Objectivity, to the dominant tendencies at that time in the central countries.

Thus, we have seen that it was in response to the new challenges posed in 1964 by the traumatic political ending of national developmentalism that Oiticica began to propose radicalised experiences of *participation*, which he called ‘antiart’ and ‘environmental art’. In the latter, intensification of the sensory exercises also implied an intensification of *participation* or of the ethical-cognitive and political praxis. Thus, the sensory exercises were generated from ‘friction with reality’<sup>88</sup> and projected on a greater scale, that of large historical synthesis. According to Oiticica’s statements in ‘Tropicália’, let us recall, such sensorial exercises should be organically committed to a peripheral and independent point of view based on Afro and Indigenous cultures, the only ones ‘which did not surrender’.<sup>89</sup>

We can say that all these propositions derive from Oiticica’s political and anthropological discovery of ‘popular constructive reason’, over the course of his visits to the Morro da Mangueira [Mangueira Hill], according to Pedrosa and Oiticica himself, as we have seen.

Still following Pedrosa, another of the most emblematic moments in this process – and now also, in this case, as a result – was the work *B 33 Bolide Box 18, Poem Box 2, Tribute to Horse Face* [*B 33 Bólido Caixa 18, Poema Caixa 2, Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo*, 1966].<sup>90</sup> In it, Oiticica paid homage to Cara de Cavalo [Horse Face], a friend of his who was murdered by the police.<sup>91</sup>

88 P. Arantes 1992, p. 13.

89 See Oiticica 1997e, pp. 124–5; Oiticica 2011e, pp. 108–9 (English translation on pp. 237–8).

90 For the image of Oiticica’s *B 33 Bolide Box 18, Poem Box 2, Tribute to Horse Face*, see Ramírez 2007, p. 380. See also Oiticica 1969, pp. 9–11, facsimile in Oiticica 2007, pp. 105–7.

91 Cara de Cavalo [Horse Face] was the nickname of Manoel Moreira (1941–64), a close friend of Oiticica who suddenly became the most wanted outlaw in Rio, after an ambush on 27 August 1964, followed by a shootout in which his pursuer, the detective Le Cocq, died. Le Cocq was the head of a police militia that was the embryo of the many ‘death squads’

As indicated in the title, *Tribute to Horse Face* – subtitle of *B33 Bolide Box 18, Poem Box 2* – was part of a series. It was therefore an act and result of a new constructive reason. In such condition, as a moment of a new poetic synthesis, the ... *Tribute to Horse Face* became a landmark and gained a following for Oiticica himself. How so?

By adopting elements of the environment that were anchored in historical time and circumstances, a new constructive system, and an openly engaged epic perspective, Oiticica outlined a new poetics: one that he would call New Brazilian Objectivity. In this way, he demonstrated the frank overcoming of the analytical phase, based on plastic or formal values, to assume a synthetic and realistic narrative key, equally proclaimed in his texts of the time as environmental art.

However, Oiticica also strongly emphasised the role of Dias's work as a decisive 'turning point' for the formulation of New Objectivity. Thus, the dialogue with *Note on the Unforeseen Death* [*Nota sobre a Morte Imprevista*, op. cit.] is inseparable from the poetic reasoning used in the ... *Tribute to Horse Face*.

In effect, Oiticica's tribute-bolide, which matured one to two years after the murder of his friend, draws from *Note on the Unforeseen Death* not only the intense tragic dimension, which Oiticica seems to apply directly to the human hunt and martyrdom to which his friend was subjected. It also interfaces with the structural or 'dialectic-pictorial' aspect of Dias's reasoning.<sup>92</sup> Thus, following in the footsteps of Dias's work, Oiticica revisits not only figuration – in this case through the incorporation of a photograph of his friend martyred by successive gunshots – but the pictorial combination of strong colours in addition to other heterogeneous elements. For this, alongside chromatic pigments and a poem as a caption, he also includes heteroclitic synthetic materials, and, in the case of Horse Face's bolide, a prosaic nylon veil.

This results in an 'anti-picture', in the terms of the decisive invention that Oiticica assigns to Dias, in the topic named by him '[a] move towards the object, as easel painting is negated and superseded', in Item 2, of 'General Scheme ...'. In Oiticica's work, however, the 'passage' from picture to object acquires even more emphatic critical relief, like a poetic-critical manifesto, since the 'passage' occurs precisely in the form of the bolide comprising a triptych which took up,

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that to this day infest the many peripheries of Brazilian cities, committing countless and rarely investigated massacres of poor young people, mainly blacks.

92 See Oiticica 1967 ('Item 2', s. n.); Oiticica 1997c, pp. 11–12; Oiticica 2011c, pp. 90–1 (English translation: p. 228).

in its own way, the votive function of pictorial object of a funeral tribute – so traditional in Western painting – to effect ‘the passage’ and become an ‘anti-painting’.

Oiticica’s critical strategy could hardly find a more sensitive point to discuss the overcoming of ‘easel painting’. The ... *Tribute to Horse Face* – whose corpse-effigy foreshadows the image of the martyred Che in Bolivia (8 October 1967) – has the tragic, compassionate and pious solemnity of a deposition from the cross, like that by Giotto di Bondone, for the Scrovegni Chapel, in Padua, around 1310.

Oiticica thus highlighted and reflectively emphasised Dias’s finding in a manner and scale similar to those proposed by Pedrosa’s essay about the notions of environmental and postmodern art, in which Pedrosa opposes the notion of ‘antiart’, proposed by Oiticica, to the cycle of modern art, whose inauguration was symbolised, according to Pedrosa, by the – easel-painting – *Demoiselles d’Avignon*.

In short, at this point we are not only in the field of formation but at the heart of the process of consolidation of a cultural system, according to Antonio Candido, insofar as one work interacts directly and closely with another. Moreover, let us note that Oiticica’s duet with Dias was not an exception. In fact, it was part of a general and larger process, fulfilled by both artists alongside others. The journey was then taken collectively as clarified by Oiticica’s many pamphlets and texts referring to his fellow travellers.

### Brazilian New Objectivity: A Collective Goal

In this journey, it is true that Oiticica’s own turning point included many steps, which involved the same logic: the Parangolés and his entrance into New Figuration, the environmental works, cloaks, banners and installations, and the proposition in 1967 of the scheme of the New Objectivity, as well as a wide range of theoretical formulations and propositions, including those of ‘antiart’ and ‘environmental art’, the ‘Declaration of principles of the avant-garde’ (January 1967), ‘Tropicália’ (1968), etc.<sup>93</sup> In fact, Oiticica wrote with the vigour of a thinker and as a historical protagonist imbued with the sense of a historian. He thus carefully documented not only his own steps, but also their

93 See Pedrosa, 1981e, pp. 205–9; Pedrosa 1998g, pp. 355–60; English translation: Pedrosa 2015g, pp. 314–17. See also ‘Seleção de textos 1960–1980 / Selection of writings 1960–1980’, in Oiticica 1997h, pp. 32–202.

meaning in relation to the steps of others, turning reflection and a historical-strategic sense into everyday material.

The general meaning of this torrent of poetic and theoretical proposals was clear and eminently political. Put simply and in aesthetic terms, Oiticica's propositions pointed towards a new constructive reason, of collectivist, epic, and multisensory characteristics. It was a 'realistic' poetics, as he himself claimed in 'General scheme ...'.<sup>94</sup> That is why the new programme, also on the initiative of Oiticica himself, took the denomination of New Brazilian Objectivity, echoing the German *Neue Sachlichkeit* – which had appeared then as the most combative and politicised incarnation of Expressionism. The denomination also intended to make explicit the aspiration to a higher critical level, in contrast to the Neo-Concrete phase: that of the encounter with a larger reality.<sup>95</sup>

Along the lines of the New Objectivity and in the next phase, Oiticica's multisensory propositions and his dive into objectivity combined with a keen awareness of *underdevelopment*. It was not a solitary path, I insist, but a process that Oiticica shared with many other artists at the time, all of whom were affected by the precursory force of Dias's work, as highlighted in 'General Scheme ...'.

Let us now point out the new critical path, in combination with the dialogues and articulations proposed at that time by other artists, who also disconnected themselves from geometric abstraction. In doing so, they found, in the awareness of *underdevelopment*, the foundation for a new constructive reason or poetic synthesis, which took various forms, while expressing its central nexus with the country's peripheral condition as the axis of a new visual system.

### Awareness of Underdevelopment

In light of the above, let us explore some of the decisive forms of the awareness of *underdevelopment*, in view of the broadest historical reflections, which may

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94 The characterisation of New Objectivity as a 'dialectical' and 'realist process', as claimed by Oiticica, is based on critic Mário Schenberg's formulation. Still, according to Oiticica, the ideas of four Brazilian critics, in addition to his own 'Parangolé Theory', also contribute to the emergence of this movement: Ferreira Gullar, Frederico Morais, Mário Pedrosa and the aforementioned Mário Schenberg. See the topic 'Conclusion', in Oiticica 1967; Oiticica 1997c, pp. 118–20; Oiticica 2011c, pp. 100–1 (English translation: p. 233).

95 See Ramírez 2007, pp. 60–1.

allow us to situate the general meaning of the objectives and fundamental lines of the Brazilian visual system thus established.

On the whole, the multisensory platform, seeking to radically involve the observer in the creative experience, aimed to overcome all conditionings, including the social ones, through the aesthetic experience.<sup>96</sup> Thus, the multisensory propositions tried to combat alienation and the inherent psychosensorial after-effects of the social division of labour. In this sense, Oiticica affirmed, in 'Position and program' (July 1966):

Anti-art answers the collective need for creative activity which is latent and can be activated in a certain way by the artist. The metaphysical, intellectualist, and aestheticist positions thus become invalidated – there is no proposal to 'elevate the spectator to a level of creation', to a 'meta-reality', or impose upon him an 'idea' or 'aesthetic model' corresponding to those art concepts, but to give him a simple opportunity to participate, so that he 'finds' there something he may want to realize. What the artist proposes is, thus, a 'creative realization', a realization exempt from moral, intellectual or aesthetic premises – anti-art is exempt from these – it is a simple position of man within himself and his vital creative possibilities.<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, in 'Environmental program', also from July 1966, during the process of constitution of the New Brazilian Objectivity, Oiticica affirmed:

I should make it a bit clearer, first of all, that such a position can only be a totally anarchic position, such is the degree of liberty implicit in it. It is against everything that is oppressive, socially and individually – all the fixed and decadent forms of government, or reigning social structures. The 'socio-environmental' position is the starting point for all social and political changes, or the fermenting of them at least – it is incompatible with any law which is not determined by a defined interior need, laws being constantly remade – it is the retaking of confidence by the individual in his or her intuitions and most precious aspirations.

96 See image of Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé* p15, *Cape 11*, 1 'Embody the Revolt' [*Parangolé* p15, *Capa 11*, *Incorpora a Revolta*, 1967], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra12915/parangole-p15-capa-11-incorpora-a-revolta>.

97 See Oiticica 1997b, p. 100; Oiticica 2011b, p. 79 (English translation: p. 223).

Politically, this position is that of all the genuine lefts of this world – not of course the oppressive lefts (of which Stalinism is an example). It could not possibly be otherwise.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, in 'The Emergence of the Suprasensory' (November–December 1967), a text written around seven to eight months after 'General scheme ...', Oiticica clarified:

For me, in my development, the object was a passage to experiences increasingly engaged with the individual behaviour of each spectator: I must insist that the search, here, is not for a 'new conditioning' of the participator, but an *overturning of every conditioning* in the quest for individual liberty, through increasingly open propositions, aimed at making each person find within themselves, through accessibility, through improvisation, their internal liberty, the path for a creative state – what Mário Pedrosa prophetically defined as the 'experimental exercise of liberty'. It is useless to want to pursue a new aestheticism through the object, or limit oneself to 'discoveries' and pseudo-advanced novelties through works and propositions. When I created and defined the idea of 'New Objectivity', it was to pin-point a characteristic state of this evolution as seen in the Brazilian avant-gardes, not to stratify concepts and create new categories: 'object' and 'environmental art'.<sup>99</sup>

In these terms, it can be concluded that the multisensory turn<sup>100</sup> was not dissociated from a reflection on the historical totality, but rather translated into a keen and new awareness of the peripheral condition of Brazil within the larger framework of the world system of production and circulation of goods. Abundant statements and notes in this sense can be found not only in Oiticica's writings, but also in those of the former Concretist painter Waldemar Cordeiro. Such notes were accompanied by a new poetic strategy that used materials

98 See Oiticica 1997b, p. 103; Oiticica 2011b, pp. 81–2 (English translation: p. 224).

99 See Oiticica 1997d, pp. 127–8; Oiticica 2011f, p. 105 (English translation: p. 236).

100 See photographs of the collective happening *Apocalipópótese* (Aterro do Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro, 1968) by Cláudio Oiticica, 'Nildo, a dancer of the Mangueira School, wearing P 19 Parangolé capa 15 "Gileasa" (dedicated to Gilberto Gil)'; and 'Poet and songwriter Torquato Neto wearing P 04 Parangolé capa 01', in Ramírez 2007, p. 386. See also Raymundo Amado's short documentary, *Apocalipópótese*, Super-8, colour, 9'11", 1968, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3sRoWg78sM> (for images of *Parangolés*, see 3'05" to 4'22").

emblematic of *underdevelopment*,<sup>101</sup> but under the scrutiny of an acute critical awareness that no longer complied with the developmentalist project.

Hence the above-mentioned conclusion, whose historical articulation with the response to the 1964 coup is made fully explicit, as I would like to stress, revisiting the text quoted at the outset:

*Tropicália* is the very first conscious, objective attempt to impose an obviously Brazilian image upon the current context of the avant-garde and national art manifestations in general. Everything began with the formulation of the *Parangolé* in 1964, with all my experience with the samba, with the discovery of the *Morros* [hills], of the organic architecture of Rio's *favelas* [slums] (and consequently of others, such as the *palafitas* [riverside shacks on stilts] of the state of Amazonas), and principally of the spontaneous, anonymous constructions in the great urban centres – the art of the streets, of unfinished things, of vacant lots, etc.<sup>102</sup>

In this reflective course, the use of materials which evoked underdevelopment was articulated to montage and syntactic constructive procedures whose development had taken place earlier, as we have seen. Such materials also alluded to class conflict, punctuated by racial distinctions. Examples of the new political and social rootedness were Cordeiro's vigorous *Popcrete* objects,<sup>103</sup> as well as an admirably synthetic poem by Roberta Camila Salgado, which Oiticica wrote by hand in the installation *Tropicália* (1967):

*Box*  
*Zinc*  
*Cardboard*

*Sand*  
*Earth*  
*Cement*

101 See image of Hélio Oiticica, *Ready Constructible nº1* (1978–9), at: <https://revistausinaadotcom.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/hc3a9lio-oiticica-ready-constructible-1.jpeg>.

102 See Oiticica 1997e, p. 124; Oiticica 2011e, p. 108 (English translation: p. 237).

103 See, for instance, images of Waldemar Cordeiro, *Newspaper* [*Jornal*, 1964]; *Against Op's Physiological Naturalism* [*Contra o Naturalismo Fisiológico Op*, 1965]; and *Hail Maria* [*Viva Maria*, 1966] at: <http://www.lucianabritogaleria.com.br/artists/37>, slides 38, 31, and 30, respectively.



Wood

Brass

Water

CONSTRUCTION<sup>104</sup>

### Participation: An Idea in Progress

The development of the originally Neo-Concretist idea of *participation* can be taken as one of the most emblematic and decisive elements of this process. From 1964 onwards, the notion of *participation* took on a new aesthetic and political perspective. Of course, such developments were collectively realised and took various forms. In the case of Oiticica, a series of works-installations such as: *B54 Bolide Area 1* [*B54 Bólido Área 1*, 1967],<sup>105</sup> *Tropicália* [*Tropicália*, 1967],<sup>106</sup> *Bolide Bed 1*, *Suprasensorial* [*Bólido Cama 1*, *Suprasensorial*, 1968],<sup>107</sup> *The Eden Plan – an Exercise for the Creleisure and Circulations* [*The Eden Plan – an Exercise for the Creleisure and Circulations*, 1969, London, Whitechapel Gallery],<sup>108</sup> in addition to the series of *Nests* [*Ninhos*, 1969],<sup>109</sup> articulated multisensory propositions with the theme of *underdevelopment*, materialising a new notion of *participation*, now inseparable from the situation and social context.

### Struggle: Do It Yourself

In the case of Dias – an artist from the generation after Oiticica's and Cordeiro's, but whose work had become since New Figuration one of the flagships of this

<sup>104</sup> Roberta Camila Salgado's poem was copied by Oiticica, by hand, and included in the installation *Tropicália*. All words were written in capital letters. The word 'Construction', however, under all of them, was bigger, serving simultaneously as a conclusion and possibly as a title for the poem. I did not see *Tropicália* in its original 1967 set-up at MAM-RJ. Yet many pictures show the white plaque (of wood or plywood?) with the poem, leaning against a flowerpot, with tree fern and a *guaimbé* plant on sand. I copied the handwritten words when I saw *Tropicália* in the exhibition *Além do Espaço/ Hélio Oiticica*, Rio de Janeiro, Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, August–October 2001.

<sup>105</sup> See image at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66331/b54-bolide-area-1>.

<sup>106</sup> See image at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66391/tropicalia>.

<sup>107</sup> See image at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra35155/bolide-cama-i>.

<sup>108</sup> See images at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66390/eden>; and <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66379/eden>.

<sup>109</sup> See image at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra7100/ninhos>.

discussion – it is worth noting how the installation *Do it Yourself: Freedom Territory/ Faça Você Mesmo: Território Liberdade* ([title originally bilingual] 1968), accompanied by the stone pieces *To the Police* (1968)<sup>110</sup> was arranged in an independent and original way, opening up a new path in relation to Oiticica's set of contemporary installations.

Thus, prior to Oiticica's above-mentioned works, *Do it Yourself ...*<sup>111</sup> brought about a less sensory and more conceptual dimension, which would come to the fore in Dias's works in the following years. At the same time, it also implied a more violent and explicit combative perspective, possibly correlated as an *objective form*<sup>112</sup> to the great worker and student struggles of 1968.

It is a fact that the aspects and features of combat and popular resistance were by no means absent from the perspective of Oiticica, who, just as he defended the violence of revolt – in his tribute to 'Horse Face' who had been slaughtered the year before – would also affirm in 1966:

All great human aspiration to a 'happy life' can only come to pass through great revolt and destruction: sociologists, intelligent politicians, and theoreticians all say so! The *Parangolé* program means to lend a strong hand to such manifestations. I know this is a dangerous, double-edged statement, but it is worthwhile. ... I am not in favour of peace; I find it useless and cold – how can we have peace or pretend to have it when there are masters and slaves? ... [I]ndividual and collective vitality will be the raising up of something solid and real despite underdevelopment and chaos – the future shall be born from this Vietnam-like chaos, not from conformity and suckerism. Only through the furious act of overthrowing can we hope to erect something palpable and worthwhile: our reality.<sup>113</sup>

However, in Dias's case, the originality of *Do it Yourself ...* regarding the multi-sensory aspect, so present in Oiticica, came to include an idea of participation that implied, in addition to other new aspects such as the resumption of the

110 See images of *Do it Yourself: Freedom Territory* (1968) and *To the Police* (1968) in Dias 2009, pp. 94–5, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#96](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#96) and p. 92, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#94](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#94).

111 See other image, from the original installation in Tokyo at the National Museum of Modern Art, in Dias 2009, p. 167, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#168](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#168).

112 For the notion of 'objective form', as a structure related to a 'general rhythm of society', see footnote 38 in Chapter 3, in this volume.

113 See Oiticica 2011b, p. 85 (English translation p. 226); see also Ramírez 2007, p. 322.

grid in a new key, the systematised idea of combat. It was a question of the aesthetic formalisation of a call, clearly analogous with the call of many insurgent student groups at the time. In fact, *Do it Yourself* ... implied extrasensory qualities as requirements, as we shall see.

Thus, the work was primarily born of a new operation of kidnapping and appropriation: the target of the time had become the aseptic and quiet Minimalist art, much practised at the time in the USA, in the manner of logical and bucolic exercises in the philosophy of language. In the occupied territory, at the discretion of the participant, *Do it Yourself: Freedom Territory* ... revisited – albeit in a novel way – aspects of abstraction and detachment from any particularism. These were now combined with a proposal of struggle. Thus, the elements of abstraction disseminated some assumptions of extrasensory practices: systematisation and discipline of rationale, a combative disposition, even to integrate an organisation, precise awareness of the historical totality as a hostile reality, incessant mobility, etc. In short, qualities of the kind required of a combatant-agitator or guerrilla fighter.

In one of his most celebrated banners, Oiticica honoured, in 1968, the anonymous anti-hero, a double of Horse Face, but whose sacrifice, unlike the latter's, remained anonymous. To that end, Oiticica used the image of the corpse of Alcir Figueira da Silva 'who when he realised he had been caught by the police ... threw away what he had stolen and committed suicide'.<sup>114</sup> In the flag, the high-contrast image of Alcir's corpse crowns the motto: 'Be an Outlaw, Be a Hero' [seja marginal, seja herói].<sup>115</sup>

Dias, in turn, set up his part in the duet with Oiticica when he proposed, in *Do it Yourself* ..., a kind of method or manual of the anonymous combatant. In this sense, in fact, the two propositions, in terms inherent to the visual arts, are

114 In the text describing the circumstances of Alcir Figueira da Silva's suicide, Oiticica explains that his tribute to the anonymous anti-hero assumes the tragic and exemplary character of revolt and is an example, in line with 'the most heroic experiences: Lampião, Zumbi dos Palmares, and later the most vivid, grandiose and heroic example, which is Guevara'. See Oiticica 1968, in Morais 1968, p. 3, *apud* Figueiredo 2002, p. 28. The text was originally written for the exhibition *The Brazilian Artist and the Mass Iconography* [*O Artista Brasileiro e a Iconografia de Massa*, organised by Frederico Morais, April–June 1968, Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial, Rio de Janeiro] and was originally published in Morais's column, 'Artes Plásticas', in *Diário de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, 10 April 1968, 2nd section, p. 3.

115 See image of Hélio Oiticica, *Seja Marginal, Seja Herói* [*Be an Outlaw, be a Hero*] (1968, flag, Rio de Janeiro, Projeto Hélio Oiticica), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra2638/bandeira-poema-seja-marginal-seja-heroi>.

part of the pamphlet-mode of other combatant propositions and calls, like the *Minimanual of the Urban Guerilla* (1969), by Carlos Marighella (1911–69).<sup>116</sup>

At the root of the genre was a widely and internationally disseminated text written in April 1967, by Che: *Create Two, Three ... Many Viet-nams, that is the watchword* [*Crear Dos, Tres ... Muchos Viet-Nam, Es la Consigna*, 1967],<sup>117</sup> which would also motivate a super 8 film by Antonio Dias, *Illustration of Art II* (1971).

The sense of combat<sup>118</sup> – the sense that art and its operations occur amidst power practices and are inseparable from struggle – and the alternation of positions permeates the whole installation.<sup>119</sup> Thus, in *Do it Yourself: Freedom Territory ...*, the practice of art as production and the practice of seeing as aesthetic reception are not distinguished. The observer is installed in what he sees and he sees by installing himself. Both actions appear intermingled, when one experiences a portion of floor demarcated and semi-chequered with adhesive tape, which can be obtained and handled as easily as a handgun. Next to it, the slogan, which is also the title of the work, proposes to the observer himself the demarcation of a free territory.

In short, the work and its experience, the act, the product and its use all merge. Any similarity to guerrilla warfare or liberation wars is no mere coincidence. Some stones, the same size as handguns,<sup>120</sup> were included in the territory of art, highlighted in the caption-title as free territory. The stones bore a metal plaque each, equal to the identification tags worn by soldiers around their necks. The tags, a current military sign of origin which, in this case, became an indication of the final destination, read in English: ‘to the police’.

In fact, the work, whose title was written in two languages, stood from the beginning as a work for international circulation, and as affirmatively internationalist. In fact, the time was one of spontaneous solidarity among all the peoples and of great anti-colonial and anti-imperialist fervour, also shared by the insurgent movements of workers and students from the central economies.

116 See Marighella 1969.

117 See Guevara 1971, pp. 297–312. The text was originally published on 16 April 1967, as Guevara 1967.

118 See image of Dias, *To the Police* (1968) in Dias 2009, p. 92, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#94](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#94).

119 See image of *Do it Yourself: Freedom Territory* (1968) in Dias 2009, pp. 94–5, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#96](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#96).

120 See image of Dias, *To the Police* (1968) in Dias 2009, p. 92, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#94](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#94).

Things snatched from others, through inversion and irony, had been used as artistic weapons since the times of New Figuration. If – as the disposition of the stones and the chequered floor made evident – the points of view of freedom and combat were mutually determined and shared the same situation, the same was true of the usage of language.

Thus, the very notion of artistic practice, according to Dias, was comparable with throwing a stone at the state security forces – the type of paving stones or marbles thrown against the cavalry in 1968, or even those thrown during an *intifada*.

Beyond the materials and circumstances, what remains as the maxim of such a construction is freedom and organisation, that is to say, symbolic construction – in short, all these practices are inseparable from struggle.

## The Situation of Art and the ‘Pensée Unique’

### A Survey in Perplexity (2004)

Forty years have passed since the military coup of 1964!<sup>1</sup> In fact, this is enough time for the emergence of two, if not three, cultural generations. What effect did these forty years have on the general evolution of culture and the arts in Brazil? Did this time really pass or did it not? Are we now separate from the consequences of the military dictatorship, or do we remain within it?

It is reasonable that every new generation of Brazilian university students, sensitive to the urgency of the rights of the majority, should ask themselves such questions and it is natural that they also ask these same questions of the previous generation. The question of the cultural consequences of the dictatorship remains an open and largely unexamined one.<sup>2</sup> In what terms?

To begin with, I propose a strategic distinction and a set of clear research objectives: this is neither the place nor the time to address the post-1964 period. The cultural rise of the left, which occurred after the coup, remaining hegemonic until the enactment of the Institutional Act Number 5 (13 December 1968), has already been extensively analysed in a vigorous, lucid and daring text. This was a judgement made in the heat of the moment, but it remains unsurpassed, either as a snapshot or as a diagnosis of the main cultural trends of the time. The text in question is Roberto Schwarz’s ‘Culture and Politics,

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- 1 This text was originally prepared for my participation in a roundtable, ‘The Coup and the Arts’. There was a panel organised by the students’ league (Centro Acadêmico Lupe Cotrim) at the School of Communications and Arts, University of São Paulo, 15 April 2004. That is, forty years after the military coup of 1 April 1964, the panel focused on the consequences of the dictatorship (1964–85) for the arts and communications. The talk was mainly addressed to that public – i.e. those in their late teens and early twenties. Thus, besides other issues, it alludes to the contrasting memories and values of the generations.
  - 2 The first analyses trying to offer a totalising and radical criticism of the central aspects of the Brazilian cultural scene over recent decades have only recently started to emerge. See P. Arantes 1999, pp. 75–100; and O. Arantes 2002, pp. 221–64. For a comparative analysis of the changes in the visual arts which took place in the 1970s, regarding the period of 1965–9, see O. Arantes 1983, pp. 4–20.

1964–1969' ['Cultura e política, 1964–1969: alguns esquemas'], first published in Paris, as circumstances demanded, in *Les Temps Modernes*.<sup>3</sup>

In order not to miss the point I am trying to make, I shall not return to the argument or to the various controversies provoked by this essay, but merely take advantage of an observation made then, to set today's goal. The cultural hegemony of the left in the period constituted 'a kind of late flowering, the fruit of almost two decades of democratisation' (November 1945 – March 64).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, we have behind us four decades of an opposite and much more bitter history. Now, we face its consequences.

The dominant or general tone in cultural circles today, as we know, is quite dissimilar to those years just after the coup.<sup>5</sup> This is the current crucial question that requires analysis: what are the sources and precise assumptions of the most influential and advanced sector of students of visual arts today at Brazilian universities? Is there a student avant-garde today? If you allow me a straight comparison so as to pose my provocative question, what are the assumptions today of the social group which corresponds to the cultural sector that shortly before and after 1964 openly defined itself as 'the left'?

In short, if today's situation is so different, the left-wing opposition faces the following question: how does the pro-capitalist spirit nowadays involve and affect the public in the process of being formed and, mainly, the new generations of university students that will soon have more active positions within Brazilian culture?

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3 See Schwarz 1970, republished in Schwarz 1978, pp. 62–92. English translation: Schwarz 1992, pp. 126–59.

4 See Schwarz 1978, p. 89. English translation: Schwarz 1992, p. 154.

5 As Roberto Schwarz said in his essay at the time (1969–70): 'To everyone's surprise, the cultural presence of the left was not suppressed during this period, rather it has continued to flourish and grow to this day. The works produced by the left dominate the cultural scene, and in certain areas their quality is outstanding. *Despite the existence of a right-wing dictatorship, the cultural hegemony of the left is virtually complete in the country*'.

See Schwarz 1978, p. 62. English translation: Schwarz 1992, p. 127.

### Pseudo-Dissolution

We must then try to realise a totalising approach that captures, in its general movements, the trajectory of the arts over the last three decades. Thus, for an analysis of the historical and cultural process in question, it is not a question of referring to the dictatorship as a watershed, but rather of unifying it with what followed.

In other words, one must also address the pseudo-dissolution of the dictatorship or the so-called democratic transition, as well as the larger economic process. The dictatorship should be seen as a part of this wider process, given that the framework of semicolonial dependence and imperialism – of which the dictatorship was merely an epiphenomenon – not only remained in place, but actually worsened.

If the cycle of industrial modernisation and conservative adjustments had ambiguous aspects until 1964, after the coup it defined, expanded, and consolidated itself. Its capitalist tenor was made very explicit and we remain within it to this day. As such, to summarise and anticipate the path to be taken, our question pertains to how the spheres of culture and the arts – which previously seemed to be on a collision course with conservative modernisation – came to be encompassed and included in the latter.

### Contrasts

To introduce what has changed in the general situation of the arts, between today and the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (with the latter forming a transitional or even contradictory period in which anti-capitalist cultural values had not yet been eliminated, despite the regime's repression), one can point to two major sets of questions or opposing poles, whose differences summarily distinguish the present time from the 1950s and 1960s in Brazil.

First, the cultural framework and the discussions that formerly took place in it were conceived as a whole. The arts constituted, as if naturally, a cohesive whole or a unique system. A series of correlated practices and fields of knowledge also concurred and converged within such a whole: architecture, visual arts, theater, cinema, journalism, the human sciences, etc. In short, there were no compartments or distinct territories, but rather an active intercommunication between the different language fields.

Second, there were some artistic and cultural parameters, criteria, and codes that had functioned as hegemonically, establishing stylistic paradigms. On the other hand, a series of critical, experimental or avant-garde initiatives



served to challenge the position of the first ones. For the sake of argument, I shall not enter into the merits of either of them here. The 1950s and 1960s were full of debates and polarisations: for instance, in the 1950s, between the defenders of the 'national popular' and defenders of Concrete art's geometric abstraction; or, later, those of the Neo-Concrete movement or those of other avant-garde currents. All such movements were fiercely debated both within and without.

### **Is Everything Permitted?**

Today, this no longer exists and – alongside the 'pensée unique', namely that there is no alternative to capitalism and to 'globalisation' – what prevails is a general feeling, in culture and in the arts, that everything is permitted, everything can be absorbed, that differences are legitimate; in short, nothing retains the capacity to shock the institutions, the media or the public. By contrast, back then, cultural activity was permanently marked by tensions, polarisations, and disputes. Only the young need this to be pointed out. The different currents of art and ideas constantly debated among themselves.

### **Empty Arenas, Same Sponsors**

Now, in turn, or until very recently – because we are, I hope, at the beginning of a change, and this debate is part of such a moment – what emerges is an arena or an empty ring. Debates are non-existent. And this evidently is another aspect and consequence of the previous phenomenon, that of indifference to the so-called 'differences' in taste, style, etc.

It should be noted that, in this order, the distinctions – which a few still insist on raising, among 'moderns' and 'post-moderns', 'formalists' and 'multiculturalists' – are hollow or insignificant, because, ultimately, they are all part of the same circuits, the same museums, the same major shows, at most in a different exhibition stand, but all under the same sponsors, or at the expense of the same tax incentives or suchlike.

### **Freedom or Atomisation?**

These conclusions and distinctions between periods can be summarised in the light of two distinct arguments or judgements, or from two perspectives on the

present. One may reflect on both visions. From an optimistic viewpoint, one can say that the personal freedom of artists and spectators, the atomisation of styles and languages, individualism or singularity, constitute a lively context for the arts since the 1980s.

On the other hand, from a more critical perspective, it may be noted that, in the last 20 years or so, the debate has disappeared from the arts, both in relation to experimentalism as such and to the impasses or traces of social 'backwardness'.

Put briefly and in respect of language experiments: any anti-experimental prohibitions or judgements were suspended. At the same time, in artistic and cultural terms, any ambition for totalising reflection was abandoned; and people in general stopped talking about the country in structural terms, as an issue. Culture and the arts are no longer divided between the 'avant-gardes' and others, nor are they concerned with the problematique of what was once called 'underdevelopment'. Moreover, today, when people declare themselves to be 'Brazilians', it is only in the anodyne and commercial sense of affirming a logo or of a 'singularity' being displayed for marketing purposes and with a multi-cultural character.

In short, according to the perspective of a non-optimistic or critical analysis, today there is a new historical level in which no prohibition affects art and artists, as opposed to what characterised the historical cycle of the emergence and development of modern art. On the other hand, there is a great silence in contrast to the strident and spirited debates of the past.

### **Circulation: Frenzy and Blindness**

Here lies the first aspect of the problem we are facing. This situation of ample and apparent permissiveness – moreover, even of comfort and slackness for many, because there have never been as many cultural centres as today, so many sponsors for culture and for the arts in Brazil; such a situation, I insist, does not mean that there is no conditioning, stratification, obstruction, aphasia, repetition or regression of various kinds.

However, such conditioning, invisible and imperceptible to most, operates first in a structural way, because on the surface there is a great variety of shapes, images, and other elements, generally considered according to the generic and abstract praise of difference – or not so generic or abstract, because it corresponds precisely to the forms of the market, freed from barriers and protectionism, as the prophets preach.

### Absence of Historical Judgement

With such a 'killjoy' diagnosis, we might risk a hypothesis: what now is missing and favours – with its absence – the inexistence of cultural disputes, today when only sponsorships are in dispute, is precisely what can be called historical reflection or a sense of historicity, articulated with theoretical and totalising reflexive ambition.

It was precisely such a critical and reflexive practice, in one way or another – to rescue forms from the past or new experiences linked to the present – that shaped the field of all those who were more deeply involved with art, language and ideas.

Let us dwell on this aspect in particular: to examine the absence of historical reflection in the present and its implications, at various levels, in its Brazilian version. Seen from a different angle, the phenomenon in question is not ours alone; rather, it arises as a 'globalised' trait. Thus, with regard to the broad discrediting of historical reflection in current aesthetic practices, covering production, reception, criticism and judgements in general, one of the striking symptoms of this phenomenon in Brazil, and this does not mean we cannot find others, is that the latest forms of group activity,<sup>6</sup> fully organised and explicit in our artistic environment, date from the 1960s, although, with roots there, they also introduce initiatives in the 1970s.

### When History was a Cause

I am specifically referring to Concrete art, Neo-Concrete movement, to the group of artists who took part in the exhibition *Opinion 65* [*Opinião*, 1965],<sup>7</sup> and to similar circles that debated and sometimes even created some informal groups, in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The latter groups generally worked on the basis of a reinterpretation of Pop art, inflecting it with a Brazilian and politicised bias, that is, according to perspectives in which an updated version of the debates around nationalism and formal experimentalism echoed.

In the 1970s, groups of artists and critics in Rio and São Paulo were active, which for about a decade reflected and intervened together, or in an organised

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<sup>6</sup> See note 1 for the text dating. At first sight, the situation has changed since 2004 when this talk was given, and group activity has become in recent years a standard for young artists. However, such changes have not affected on a deeper or structural level the issues discussed here. I will return to this point later.

<sup>7</sup> *Opinião 65* (Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 12 August–12 September 1965).

way, at various levels. It is not for us here to discuss and decide whether this activity, unlike that of the avant-gardes,<sup>8</sup> already aimed at a new regime of alliances between criticism, artistic production, and the market. Indeed, at least some of the advanced segments of art galleries, collectors, and journalists were then 'colonised' by 'civilisatory' missions or initiatives of critics and artists for the sake of aesthetic 'enlightenment'.<sup>9</sup>

For our purposes, it is important to emphasise that this enlightened strategy – so fashionable at that time – continued a number of previous practices, since it maintained criteria for concerted group action, according to a planned intervention strategy. Practically all of these groups, no matter their limits and disagreements, engendered their interventions according to historical and theoretical analyses, not only of art history, but also of culture and the historical moment as a whole. In short, such groups shared an ambition to develop comprehensive and rational historical perspectives.

### Turning Point

It is a fact, however – and this is one side of the issue – that the majority of authors working in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s minimised, in the two last decades, collective projects of construction with a comprehensive historical perspective. Thus, when compared to previous examples, the activities of the last two decades are characterised by the construction of individual careers and often by solo practices in the international circuit, which opened up to the Brazilian visual arts, whose accumulation from the 1950s to the 1970s is today distinguished on the international stage, evoking, if distantly, the earlier prestige of Brazilian modern architecture.

### Adjusting Priorities

It is true that historical reasoning and reflexivity are in many cases still central and distinctive factors. They are responsible for the coherence and precision of these poetics, chiefly produced in previous decades. But it is also true that now this reasoning unfolds to the benefit of the work of every individual, and it has abandoned the habit of roundtables and collective cooperation.

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8 See O. Arantes 1983.

9 For further comments on these issues, see Chapter 6, and Chapter 13, in this volume.

In short, to speak in current terms, 'priorities have been reversed (or readjusted)'. And the importance previously given to a policy of joint intervention in the context of a national culture, of a critical pedagogical action, of a collective strategy of confrontation with the corresponding cultural institutions, museums, newspapers, etc., in order to influence the action of these institutional agents and to form a broad audience in this or that direction, has become weaker or has been pushed aside.

However, in order to synthesise the arguments and spark debate, it can be affirmed that organised and collective action, as well as the practice of collaborative reflection and dialogue with historical ambition, ultimately gave way to individual exercises, in the middle of an artistic-critical constellation that is much less cohesive than before.

### Rarefied Relations and 'Pensée Unique'

Now, when we look at how more recent artists have acted, for instance those who emerged over the course of the 1980s, we notice that the tendency towards the rarefaction of moments of collective dialogue and historical reflection is accentuated. If there are still artists and critics, with common links, identified even by the media, such links primarily stand out for being affective, generational, circumstantial – in short, they emerge from the sphere of private life. And when they result in an association, such links adopt at first the model of the condominium around a gallery, or of the consortium to exhibit and commercialise artworks. That is, they seek to first establish a position in the market – once this field, the market, is claimed to be the only possible reality. In fact, at present, the arts and culture exist under the aegis of the so-called 'pensée unique', that is, the one of the dissolution of history and of the reification of market relations as the only space corresponding to all human differences.

### More of the Same

Very recently, one can see the formation of groups. Some of these profess anti-institutional attitudes and even claim critical perspectives. This phenomenon deserves attention and monitoring, but it has not yet accumulated the force needed to alter the correlations and established power relations. Therefore, it does not change the fundamental lines of the comparison and the analysis proposed here.

Finally, in order to resume the thread: who remembers supra-personal cultural or artistic conflicts in recent times? Who can recall a manifesto, a collective clash with an institution or curator, an open and explicit political claim, as to the orientation of an institution? Has anyone watched in the last years an open public debate between different 'trends', a publication with a clearly defined programme of action, etc? At most, there are demands for multiculturalist recognition, or for assertion of the new, reified as a fetish.

### **Market Surveys**

In a few words, even at the risk of simplification but seeking to establish a frame of reference for the debate, one can affirm that the great majority of cultural and artistic agents, since the rise of Thatcher and Reagan and the spread of neoliberalism, became accustomed to elaborating their conflicts and positions in individual terms. At best, their exercise of reflection is limited to the consultation of successful cases in the international art system, which could be understood as an isolated and specialised field of operations and knowledge, not so far removed from financial markets. In short, public debates around ideas and position-taking are practically non-existent, and the field of historical reflection has given way to market surveys or to the logic of convenience and self-interest.

### **Franchising**

When one examines a correlative area, the action of cultural institutions, the absence of historical reflection and the dissolution of a political conception of cultural activity, in the broad sense, is heightened. Institutions that still maintain their own qualified technical staff and that seek a definite line of action are increasingly rare. On the other hand, institutional events bought as packages in the offices of cultural entrepreneurs are more and more frequent, according to the logic of franchising.

Therefore, we observe a phenomenon – that of the demise of historical reflection – which, with manifestations of distinct qualities, to different degrees and at different levels, is part of a structural historical tendency with a general reach. It should be noted that, given the differences and specific degrees, this trend occurs on an international scale. Is this a desirable trend or not? It is up to the new generations to ask themselves this question – the same generations who were repeatedly told that there was no alternative.

Faced with such a question, should we seek to elaborate a value judgement to blame certain works, authors, and individuals responsible for this or that way of acting, or confront generations about such changes? Certainly, this would be an error. What really matters, first and foremost, is to locate and evaluate a widespread historical trend, seeking to understand how it affects, permeates, and overdetermines, to various degrees, all of today's works.

### **Follies, Phantasmagorias, Idiosyncrasies**

As for the disuse of historical reflection, many possibilities are certainly lost as a result of the current state of affairs, as characterised above. Specifically, much is lost in the broader pedagogical and political aspect of the formation of new authors and of a critical audience, as well as within the very sphere of artistic production, in which it is harder to delimit and verify these things. In any case, there are quite visible losses in the average quality of production. Yet much more is lost in the quality of reception, unaided by historical reflection, deprived of theoretical and critical projects. So one remains floating in a kind of autism and subject to many idiosyncratic factors and follies, which have become fashionable among curators and exhibition sponsors.

In effect, if certain more experienced and privileged artists have their own feeling of tension, a concentration or discipline and a history of work which, with no apparent disadvantage, allows them to act on the basis of their own criteria, on the other hand, the younger generations, a great part of the average production, and the general public are decidedly affected by the disuse of several critical collective practices. And who guarantees that even in the case of more mature and cohesive poetics, there is no loss of intensity due to the dearth of controversy or to the market-based state of affairs wherein all occurrences are atomised, evanescent, lacking any relation to history? The most attentive onlooker will also note the loss of anger among the 'senate' of the visual arts in Brazil.

### **Condemned to Nothingness**

In short, beyond the angle of the genesis of works, the extensive and generalised depoliticisation, not in the context of the themes (because 'multiculturalism' sees itself as politicised – without being so), but in structural terms, the absence of radical political reflection, which devours culture today, condemns it to nothingness insofar as even those works that hold a genetic tension and

political questioning are consumed like all the others. Just think: from Soviet avant-garde art to any other artistic manifestation one may argue, everything can be exhibited, disseminated, and sponsored by Bank x or the like, because the mode of consumption equalises and annuls them, regardless of their history or specific orientation. The end of the historical cycle of modern art or of the avant-gardes was accompanied by the end of the symbolic and social sphere of criticism.

### Going into a Political Coma

That said, how are we to proceed to the probing of the structural causes of this historical phenomenon? To begin with, if we look at the divergences and divisions that shook the geometrical art ranks, opposing Concrete and Neoconcrete trends, as well as other currents mentioned above, we will find that debates and oppositions about aesthetic choices and deliberations – for instance, with respect to the materials used, the procedures and circuits involved – were constantly linked to different standpoints taken in respect of society and the country's destiny.

It is not necessary to go into detail, because what matters at this point is to underline what was then presupposed – in a common way and beyond discrepancies – that there was an effective power to intervene in the course of culture and of the country, and that these issues constituted open questions.

Summarising, for the young, some facts about the history of our days, in the early 1980s, the sharp rise in interest rates by the US Federal Reserve Bank then caused a foreign debt crisis in Brazil (as well as in other peripheral countries), which interrupted the model of accumulation, development, and industrialisation pursued by the military dictatorship.

This was followed by the regime's political crisis and an increase in social protests. However, in 1984, the right wing managed to stifle the movement that was taking over the streets, demanding direct presidential elections. The conservatives also succeeded in imposing a negotiated transition model: the Electoral College, which chose a politician who had not effectively participated in the movement for direct elections, Tancredo Neves, assisted in its backstage plot by senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Ten years later, Cardoso's administration came to constitute a direct and express legacy of the manoeuvres, in closed circuit, which led to the Electoral College, instead of the overthrow of the dictatorship by the people, then rallied in the streets.

Once stripped of all illusions, there is a vertiginous awareness that the current Lula administration (2003–6), led by the Workers's Party (PT), has never



been against and does not escape the same scheme. In fact, it fulfils today precisely and directly obligations to the same type of conciliatory political arrangement that promoted the Electoral College and the same economic programme of the administrations of Collor (1990–2) and Cardoso (1995–2002).

As a result, politics that, in light of the regime's disintegration, were undergoing something of a renewal and becoming appealing and interesting to growing portions of society and the intelligentsia, turned once again into a matter for a few. Analogously, the economy, strangled by external and internal debts on the one hand, and blockaded to the political participation of the majority on the other, was voluntarily given over, after a few contradictory moves, to the management of bureaucrats. The latter's party affiliation no longer matters, because they all pay respect to the same multilateral institutions and to the same debt obligations.

### In the Void

Since the 1980s, one can say that the Brazilian context was gradually forgotten as a collective nucleus and as a matter of general interest – as if it were something whose trajectory did not concern the population. Regarded as a seriously ill patient in a financial ICU and managed according to inaccessible and indisputable criteria – whose main objective was and remains the country's adjustment to neoliberal prescriptions – the Brazilian sociopolitical and economic complex, as a position of cultural reflection and as an object and structural reference for the arts, dissolved – much like a chronic patient who could no longer be counted on for anything at all.

In the void – which replaced the nation as a historical and cultural formation – it is no longer possible to publicly defend a theoretical position. 'People should deal with their own problems' has become a principle of reality, a sign of wisdom, in order to survive in the wreckage.

### Impregnable Circle

The artistic intelligentsia has thus resigned itself to the new order, as if it were impregnable and as if nothing could be expected from it – not even a reliable cause of death certificate to then bury, with a clear conscience, any souvenir of reflection beyond the market fragmentation.

Although similar characteristics, of negation of historicity and its corresponding collective reflection, manifest themselves on an international scale, it

is true that – just to anticipate some objections – in Brazil, some outbreaks or spasms of civic ardour appeared as fissures in this scheme: the fervour orchestrated through the price freeze of the so-called Crusade Plan [Plano Cruzado], in 1986; the presidential campaign of 1989 (Lula vs. Collor); the campaign for the impeachment of Collor in 1992; and even the expectations linked to the election of Lula in 2002. But in the end and in light of the present, these phenomena arise retrospectively as but mere local and transitory mirages.

What matters is that macro-decisions, according even to members of the current administration (Lula, 2003–6), are not taken as if they concern the many, but remain under the control of just a few. Therefore, any reference to them is a sign of naivety or folly of those who have no respect for the limits of specialised knowledge.

In short, it is known that the general perception, hostile to the considerations of socioeconomic development, to collective dialogues or to public debates of ideas, but favourable to the idea of personal and individual ascension, was established not just here but across the planet. We are involved in a larger problematique, that of the so-called ‘pensée unique’. However, here I have sought to outline the Brazilian perspective on such a problem, which is scarcely discussed in the artistic-cultural milieu.

### *Phantom and Rescue, Two Critical Exceptions*

So as to avoid closing this attempt to discuss the disuse of historical reflection in flat and peremptory terms, and without raising any contradictory elements, I would like to mention two works presented in São Paulo in 1998 and 2001. Both escape this global prescription, since they contain, among their work materials, elements related to states of perception and thought situations exercised collectively.

### *Wreckage and Stray Bullets*

*Ghost* [*Fantasma*, 1994–5]<sup>10</sup> by an artist of the late 1960s generation, Antonio Manuel, exhibited at the 1998 Biennial (where I saw it), presents us with a large and welcoming white environment, open to the passers-by like a park or

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10 See images at: <http://f.i.uol.com.br/folha/ilustrada/images/13350352.jpeg>; and <http://www.bienal.org.br/publicacao.php?i=2101>, pp. 88–9.

pleasant square amid the streets. However, at the same time, in this environment small charcoal pieces are scattered around, hanging from the ceiling on nylon threads. The installation reminds those who enter it, and the passers-by, of the watchfulness required to walk around today's city streets. It also stresses the unpredictability that looms over everybody within a ruined society, where a flood of projectiles, the stray bullets, come from nowhere – not to mention countless other shocks around which we must swerve in order to protect ourselves in the damaged cities where we live.<sup>11</sup>

### Prison, a Way of Life and a Model

Similarly, *Rescue* [*Resgate*, 2001], by Tunga,<sup>12</sup> a proposal formed by a complex of performances and participations, establishing a 'collective scene', as the artist calls it, was set up during the inauguration of the Cultural Centre Bank of Brazil [Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil], in São Paulo, in 2001. That is, in a luxurious and ostentatious building, erected according to the standards of taste of a slave-based society, to house the regional headquarters of the state bank. The 'collective scene' brought inside the eclectic palace of such a bank a series of elements and signs identifiable as typical of the excluded and marginalised of Brazilian society. Thus, Tunga's proposition went through the constitution of a prison escape scene structured around a collective making of a redemptive rope – a *tereza* as it is called – amidst some dreamlike signs.

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11 In a text published in the catalogue of his exhibition at the Art Centre Hélio Oiticica (Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica-СМАО, Rio de Janeiro), the artist described his installation: 'The work *Ghost* [*Fantasma*] consists of about 900 pieces of charcoal, hanging from the ceiling on nylon threads at different heights. The pieces float in the gallery space around a photograph of the Ghost on the wall, illuminated by torch-lights. It is an experience in which the visual force of the mass formed by the charcoal pieces requires viewers to go through the installation. By crossing the installation to approach the image of the 'Ghost', viewers can touch or be touched and marked by the charcoal. The spectre of violence revealed by the charcoal and by the photograph is compensated by the lightness of the suspended pieces. The photograph (of a hooded man) which is part of the installation is of a real character whose image was divulged by the media as witness of a crime, having to live in hiding since then, losing his identity and turning into a true ghost'. See Manuel 1997, p. 61.

12 With Lia Rodrigues Companhia de Danças [Dances Company] and music by Arnaldo Antunes. See images and description of the work at: <http://www.tungaoficial.com.br/en/trabalhos/resgate-2/>. See the video recording by Toni Cid and Lucia Helena Zaremba at: <https://vimeo.com/45080261>.

A prison, that is a place where the gregarious impulse to socialise is broken and hindered by incarceration. Thus, the social and visual model of the prison, which anyone who follows the media will recognise as a paradigm of sociability in Brazil today – launching models of behaviour and brand names for other social spheres – was made explicit by the artist as a living and active collective subject in the midst of the wreckage of national institutions. In fact, these are drifting around like the remains of a shipwreck, the result of the application of neoliberal and privatising prescriptions, among other things.

Of course, neither of those two works can be reduced simply to those aspects mentioned here. However, what I intended to emphasise is that in considering the presence of these historical materials, both works distinguish themselves from the legion of those which today are resigned to the condition of fragments, moreover, whose only aims are to be characterised as specialised operations of art, with no other reflexive or critical ambition.

## Formation and Dismantling of a Brazilian Visual System

### Nations, What for?

Can national sentiment have any meaning in the current experience of art? Can the current experience of art somehow constitute national sentiment? What reciprocity still exists in such relations? With the fall of cultural barriers, with increasingly unstable and indistinct exhibitions, with free consumption, what is the sense of supposing national histories in the arts?

And yet, the historical scene *counts*. A recent exhibition at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art – MAM-SP, *Concrete 56. The Root of Form*,<sup>1</sup> remembering the *First National Exhibition of Concrete Art*,<sup>2</sup> presupposed a specific and definite history for the fine arts in Brazil, very distinct from today's situation, mixed in with the situation of other countries.

There are other exhibitions in the same situation: the *First Exhibition of Neo-Concrete Art*,<sup>3</sup> *Opinion 65*,<sup>4</sup> *Brazilian New Objectivity*.<sup>5</sup>

Incidentally, some of these were recently re-presented, like cinematographic remakes. They have market value and circulate today as settings for sale, fetishes of an already distant and hazy process, which once seemed to have its own pace. In the recent re-presentation, the goal was to mirror the original exhibition. The only contradictory thing was the public which, unlike the first, 'couldn't care less' – but such a public nevertheless '[is] everywhere', and circulates all the time.<sup>6</sup>

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1 *Concreta 56. A Raiz da Forma*, São Paulo, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 27 September–3 December 2006. Curated by Lorenzo Mammi.

2 *Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta*, São Paulo, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 4–18 December 1956; Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, February 1957.

3 *Exposição de Arte Neoconcreta*, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 22 March 1959 [start date].

4 *Opinião 65*, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 12 August–12 September 1965.

5 *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 6–30 April 1967.

6 A result of the expansionist greed of a process which is already devouring its own history, the

## New Circulation

Where does this circulation come from and where does it go? It reflects a long-standing *boom* and denotes the new economic structure. The field of the fine arts has expanded and become professionalised; the milieu has become euphoric and glamorous, like the circles of advertising and investment. A diffuse feeling that everything is possible is added to that. The linguistic norms that the avant-gardes faced have been discredited, as has the censorship that existed during the dictatorship. Production has significantly increased and it has become varied; differences prevail, which is to be welcomed.

But the productive, financial, and institutional idyll of the arts in Brazil includes a contradictory aspect: the *current insignificance of art*. Nevertheless, a tight circle of silence closes in around this issue; the malaise is discarded and does not obscure the euphoria. In fact, the merry-go-round of tax incentives runs wild. There is no self-respecting bank, economic group or manager today that does not have consultancies, initiatives, and institutes for the fine arts.

## Consensus, Money, Current Gaze

The *insignificance* translates into the lack of impact of art, except for publicity or in financial terms. The subjective experience of art is ephemeral; production and consumption are *fast*. The public has grown in size, given the aforementioned expansion, but it is largely indifferent. Only traces of labile curiosity, hustle and bustle proliferate. And soon comes the next show. Inflation, so well-known, has moved from the realm of currency to the arts – or do the arts play the role of second money?

Let it not be alleged that the public have always been oblivious to the production debate. It must be recognised that there are no disputes, discussions on poetic doctrines or structural critical exercises. The media opens up spaces for art. But these are social or business chronicles, records of quotations and operations, equivalent to investment and transactions analyses, made by financial

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specular-show constitutes a genre. The Orangerie Museum in Paris, for example, presented at the beginning of 2007, the exhibition *Orangerie, 1934: les 'Peintres de la Réalité'* (Paris, Musée de l'Orangerie, 22 November 2006–5 March 2007), a virtual reconstitution of an entire 1934 exhibition. In addition to some original works that were part of the first exhibition, external aspects were also included, namely photographs of the curators and of the repression against demonstrations that occurred in the vicinity of the museum, even though they were not directly related to the exhibition.

journalism. Nor do artists debate or take an interest in one another's logic of production. The existing reciprocal attention concerns modes of circulation. The tacit neoliberal agreement, the 'Washington Consensus' in the fine arts, requires silence in response to art's loss of meaning.

In short, art has become a 'self-sustaining' topic and, in this condition, it shares in the double nature of any mercantile object, that is, in an intrinsic dimension with aspects that are inherent to the use or function and to their materiality and, in a second nature, abstract and for exchange. *Sharing* is one way of putting it, since the use and functions of art, other than exchange, have crumbled like a dry umbilical cord.

Art today has actually more in common with money, the special commodity whose main function is the representation of value, than with any other product. The ontological alterity attributed to art at the dawn of modernity, under the sign of so-called 'aesthetic autonomy', regardless of the backdrop of controversies, disappeared like other religious, uplifting, and other kinds of meaning it once had. The aspect highlighted by Duchamp one century ago, the mould of exchange or reception in signification, now is our everyday bread. Beginners intuit their object as money.

The lack of meaning is not exclusive to current art. Everything *one sees today* is bundled together and shuffled in the general economy of images. And we see images as we see TV or monitor screens, or as we move from one billboard to the next in traffic: quickly and absentmindedly, among countless options.

The phenomenon is global: from places for reading, museums have become centres of convenience, fruition, and sociability not dissimilar to a shopping mall. This way of seeing presents analogies with that of the solicitous courtiers and clergymen of old, who lived in palaces and churches crammed with paintings, statues, tapestries and frescoes, the meaning of which counted little in the face of the prolixity of the ornaments and the aulic functions of those environments.

### Neo-Baroque Attention

Our visual attention has become weak, as much as or more so than palatial and clerical attention to the arts was prior to the public cognitive function of autonomous art. In contrast, the attention of apparatuses that scrutinise us and record our actions is far more incisive than our own.

Far from the false inertia and passivity of Baroque mirrors, which seemed to shrewdly hibernate in rooms – but which were effective means of disciplining, like preventive surveillance posts – the artificial eyes behind today's lenses

remain active and awake as we sleep or forget about them; they watch *all that has value or carries a threat to it*. Objective lenses and memory banks revolve in satellites and permanently control the circulation of individuals and commodities. The location of the cameras, the power of accumulation and interconnection of their memories know no limits.

Around the function and the varied modes of surveillance, not only is a new economy constituted; so too is a new ballistic science, which systematises targets and regimes of expansion, bringing together intelligence bodies and state backing. It recalls the importance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of research into projectile trajectories, which galvanised the founding fathers of modern science. Domesticated, we smile in cages at the *gratifying* devices of identification and surveillance. *I am visible; therefore I exist.*

### Money-Images and Surveyed Highways

Almost all current art pretends to be uninvolved (the tragic Andy Warhol and the acerbic Harun Farocki were notable exceptions, followed by only a few).

To pretend to have nothing to do with the economy of visual surveillance, and to benevolently accept to be part of the intense circulation of images, is the active principle of the current general consensus of the visual arts. With such docility towards the benefits of circulation, the arts are stripped of all critical ambition. But we should not get embroiled in such a dilemma – to be or not to be. That said, in view of this spiral of acts of deliberate alienation, it is worth asking: If art today gets so many mentions, even though it is fleeting and weak, is it not because it does not confront the reality of the modes of identification and sensory surveillance? That is to say, because it does not even try to account for the regime of circulation and value of its own basic material, which ultimately consists in images? It spins thus, emptied of all critical capacity, as a derivative of bonds without real ballast.

In the end, for better or for worse, it suffers from the immense imagistic inflation which has become a global phenomenon, permanently watched by devices, ranging from satellites to mobile phones, not to mention screens and telephones – which also record us – installed in our workplaces and homes.

Although there is no time to dwell on such kinship, finances and surveillance complement one another as communicating vessels from the same circulatory system. Or, in other words, financialisation of the global economy and the general conversion of everything into images are two faces of the current global order. If this is not recognised as a basic ingredient of its field of action,



contemporary art will remain doomed to irrelevance, or to a mere regime of *fast* consumption.

### In the Time of No-Man's Lands

But let us return to the counterpoint between image and historic process, in the case of Brazil. The precariousness of the professionalisation and market value of the arts in the 1950s and 1960s contrasted with the intellectual weight that such languages started to accrue at the time on a national scale for the debate of ideas. The living contradiction stemmed from the potential strength of the rapidly developing visual arts and of their narrow, idiosyncratic, artisanal and non-institutional surroundings. The collective force of the visual artworks of that time interacted with the other visual arts (architecture, graphic arts, photography, cinema) and also spread to other discourses. It flowed into the intensity of the debates around it.

If pre-1964 geometric art echoed the diffusion of a planner's ideology, post-1964 art became one of the forums for critique and reflection of the left, which had been partially seduced by the siren song of modernising planning, of the Kubitschek administration (1956–61), and of the basic reforms by Jango (João Goulart, 1961–4). The 'work of mourning', after the 1964 coup, passed through the arts.<sup>7</sup> Thus, before and after 1964, the arts acted as a large public laboratory of visual languages concerning the future of the country.

Hence the first conclusion: the apparent opulence of today's art is false and speculative, restricted to monetisation and related facts. Today's scene is poor in criticism and reflection, lacking significance and intensity of participation.

In order to overcome the duality of scenes and nostalgic fascination, let us project the discussion onto another plane. One hypothesis for the insignificance of art is the atomisation inherent to its circulation and therefore to its production, in the context of contemporary art. Dialogic reciprocity and a sense of tragedy – inherent in the dialogue with reality – and a historical judgement in all instances have disappeared. Unlike Baudelaire's proposition, which aimed at the rational apprehension of the sensation of the ephemeral – and consequently, at its universalisation – today, art and the public limit themselves to multiplied but fleeting contacts. This results in idiosyncrasies and the like.

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7 See the sharp analysis by Schwarz 1978, pp. 61–92. The text was originally published under the title 'Remarques sur la culture et la politique au Brésil, 1964–1969', in Schwarz 1970. English translation: Schwarz 1992, pp. 126–59.

Earlier the arts formed part of a whole and played various functions in it. The whole included the artistic past that legitimated (or negated) the action in its currentness, as well as other symbolic functions, corroborated or denied, through artistic acts and products. Hence the lively arts forum about the country and all the rest. In short, today there is a lack of *historical judgement* and *totalising reflection*, which were previously nexuses between the fragmented artistic form and the whole – and hence the atomisation, which is more than apparent; it is real.

### System and Formation

Historical judgement and totalising reflection are implicated in the *formation of cultural systems*, a concept elaborated by critic Antonio Candido for the literary field. Such a concept allows one to move the discussion beyond the dichotomies and predications of the spirit, and to inscribe the question in history, giving it objective dialectical consistency and maturity. The idea of *formation* is the basis of such a criticism as a process to overcome the aftereffects of the colonial condition, variously employed after the so-called ‘Revolution of 1930’ by authors who studied the national society.<sup>8</sup>

Literature and other fields have included the critical application of the notion of *formation*, making up a common field of work and spanning several intellectual generations. In view of examining the historical-intellectual process of nations of colonial origin and, therefore, of late formation, the totalising point of view of *formation* sees *volubility* and *eclecticism* as chronic cultural symptoms of dependence. The absurd succession of cultural ideas and trends, the lack of nexus and ‘of friction with reality’,<sup>9</sup> point to nations plundered of their own problematique, limited to symptoms or aftereffects of mentality, with colonial origin.

A parenthesis should be made at this point. Between the 1930s and 1960s, the process of *formation* was seen as not only desirable but also achievable. On certain planes it had been objectivated – according to Candido’s analysis of the *formation* of the Brazilian literary system in the second half of the nineteenth century, which pointed out such qualitative and constitutive inflection based on the work of writer Machado de Assis. If the diversified and uneven Brazilian

8 On the notions of *formation* and *system*, see Candido 2006a and 2006c, in 2006d, pp. 9–19; also Candido 2002, pp. 93–120. For the current debate, see P. Arantes 1992; O. Arantes and P. Arantes 1998; Schwarz 1999i, pp. 9–58.

9 See P. Arantes 1992, p. 13.

cultural process gave rise to sectoral cultural *formations*, differentiated and chronologically disparate, that of the greater whole, the nation, did not take place and, without entering into the discussion on empirical and imaginary aspects of the nation-form, it is clear for many that this will never be realised.

As such, has the idea of *formation* become useless? Disregarding the bets, what remains is that the notion of *formation*, combined with the negative term of *dismantling*, now establishes, as a process of critical totalisation, an effective and decisive platform for comparative criticism and historical judgement.<sup>10</sup>

### Dependency and Negation: Some Episodes

Let us return to the overcoming of dependency. How does it work? Through the ability to 'produce first-rate works, influenced not by immediate foreign models, but by previous national examples'. Candido calls this 'internal causality'.<sup>11</sup>

The overcoming of dependency or the constitution of the 'internal causality', in which a work creates nexuses with others, implies the mode of *commitment* or of *interested participation*, through which the aesthetic function projects itself onto the historical process.

Let us provide an example, studied by Otilia Arantes: for Lúcio Costa, idealiser of the Pilot Plan of Brasília, the first cases of modernist architecture of the 1920s constitute an isolated or 'unparalleled' case.<sup>12</sup> They do not result in a modern architecture in the country. The decisive step for the *formation* comes from the 1937 commission of the project for the headquarters of the Ministry of Education and Health. The episode marks the beginning of the direct partnership between the state, then under Vargas's Bonapartist rule (1930–45) with plans of modernisation, and the group of young architects, led by Costa – affiliated to the ideas of Le Corbusier and supported by his visit to Brazil. Later, many works for regional governments would associate modern architecture with the image of the planner state.

The example removes any illusion of autochthonous cultural formations, national in essence. A foreign cultural formation is therefore appropriated, deviated or reinterpreted, in such a way that it comes to carry new objectives and needs according to the formative process. Candido thus saw the formation

<sup>10</sup> See Schwarz 1999i, pp. 9–58.

<sup>11</sup> See Candido 1989b, p. 153; English translation: Candido 2014b, pp. 119–41.

<sup>12</sup> See Costa 2003, pp. 78–97. About the text above and the aforementioned formative process, I follow here the acute interpretation of O. Arantes 2004, pp. 84–103.

of Brazilian literature. Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes also studied Brazilian cinema in the same way.

Is it appropriate to apply these criteria to the visual arts? Art critic Mário Pedrosa proposed three phases of implantation of modern art in the country: the Modern Art Week of 1922; the one triggered by the aforementioned 'Revolution of 1930', which had its driving force in architecture; and that of the Biennials, which had (geometric abstractionist) painting as its flagship.<sup>13</sup>

Let us review the periodisation to situate for the fine arts the possible keystone of the *internal causality* or the decisive phenomenon equivalent to that of Machado de Assis in literature. Without disregarding their oeuvres, painters Anita Malfatti, Tarsila do Amaral and Di Cavalcanti did not establish a reciprocal nexus between them, nor did they engage in an effective dialogue with the previous generations or set parameters for the future – even for themselves, because their works present great imbalances and disparities in their development.

*Discontinuity* and *volubility* still ruled Brazilian fine arts, while architecture had recently become mature and had started, not long before, to play a governmental role. The national muralism of the 1930s and 1940s, realised in spaces granted by architecture, depended more on foreign models (that is, the Mexicans and Picasso) than Brazilian precedents. Let us take another example, from another angle: In 1948, two of the future exponents of Concrete art in Brazil, Waldemar Cordeiro and Luiz Sacilotto, created expressionist paintings on the verge of the emergence of the avant-garde group Ruptura (1952), the nucleus of Concrete art in Brazil ...

The constitution of an *internal causality*, surpassing individual actions in the fine arts in Brazil, only came about in the third phase pointed out by Pedrosa. Contributing to this were the following: 1) the foundation of the great museums in Rio and in São Paulo; 2) Max Bill's exhibition at the São Paulo Museum of Art–MASP in 1950 and the award he obtained at the First São Paulo Art Biennial (1951), which led to him becoming a catalyst, analogous to Le Corbusier, for young architects; 3) the beginning of the Biennials; and 4) last but not least, the opening of a cycle of economic expansion, of industrialisation and urban growth in the country – a process in which the belief in the redemptive virtues of planning was disseminated.

An unprecedented agglutination then took place around geometric abstractionism and the paradigm of geometric abstraction came to dictate the tone

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13 See Pedrosa 1986, pp. 217–23; 1995b, pp. 251–6; English translation (extracts): Pedrosa 2015i, pp. 153–68.

of the visual debate in Brazil from 1951 to 1964. The graphic arts, advertising, furniture industry, and other sectors associated with visuality also came to be influenced by the geometric paradigm. The unprecedented scale of the actions, in terms of the longevity and dissemination of the proposals, then far surpassed the sphere of the matrix-groups, Ruptura, from São Paulo, and Frente, from Rio, formed in 1952 and 1954, respectively, as well as their successors: Concrete and Neo-concrete art.

### Formation: Process and Critical Maturity

Considering a larger historical arc, one can discern thus the constitution of the dialectical unity of a field of questions or of the *formation of a system*. Many unique artistic experiences, which resorted in different ways to geometry, combined with non-mathematical elements and procedures, have also gravitated towards the centre of Concrete and Neo-concrete geometric abstraction. In this case, the strength of the geometric aesthetic aspect was even revealed to dialectically nurture artistic researches whose foundations would be virtually antithetical.

In this way, some of the most striking cases of the Brazilian visual arts in the period come from (if sometimes by way of negation) the crossbreeding with geometry. It is worth noting that, in order to better date the abstract geometric vector – which then set the pace and prompted strong oppositions as the most salient will of the national visual process – this paradigm had nothing to do with the preceding Brazilian art (for example, with the eclectic and decorative use of geometry by Antonio Gomide and John Graz). In fact, to claim roots in its vicinity, Brazilian geometric abstraction could only point to Argentine and Uruguayan movements.<sup>14</sup>

The above-mentioned exhibitions constitute milestones within such a formative process. They denote the conflictual but continuous development of a visual programme, *committed* – more than any other in the century – to a moment of Brazilian history: that of planned development.

The ambiguities of the modernising planning, oscillating between autocratic tendencies, subordinate integration, and a broadening of the foundations of democracy, opened a flank for the 1964 coup. Geometric abstractionism proved ultimately critically anachronistic in the military era. In fact, Concrete and Neo-Concrete poetics, via distinct angulations, had echoed the debates on

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14 See Amaral 1993, pp. 86–99.

planning as a means for the virtuous modernisation of the country. But while some planners went into exile after the coup, like economist Celso Furtado, others began to salute the regime and, as a result, planning became synonymous with dictatorship.

In the period between 1964 and 1968 – before the Institutional Act No. 5 ('AI-5', as it's called in Brazil) cut off once and for all the opposition, leading many to imprisonment, others into exile, and silencing any criticism of the regime – the intellectual opposition contradictorily flourished, although the trade union movement had already been stifled. In spite of presenting this contradiction, as Roberto Schwarz noted, the debate in the period developed fruitfully due to the previous critical accumulation.<sup>15</sup> The visual arts actively participated in this process and could even influence other languages to a degree unprecedented in Brazilian history.

The most lively, restless, and creative faction of the Concrete and Neo-Concrete groups abandoned geometric abstraction and gathered in the aforementioned breakthrough-exhibitions: *Opinion 65* [*Opinião 65*, 1965], where the New Figuration emerged, and *Brazilian New Objectivity* [*Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, 1967]. Young artists like Antonio Dias were joined by Cordeiro and Geraldo de Barros, coming from Concretism, and Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, from Neo-Concretism.

### Maturity through Struggle

The New Figuration marked a break with the language of geometric abstractionism. In it, images became a strategic resource. The movement appropriated North American Pop art, hijacking it from its original context. It stripped its elements from their hedonistic and consumerist context to associate them, against the grain, with signs of violence and death, pauperism and inequality. It thus became a counter-discourse and a stage for symbolic confrontation. Aggressively re-elaborated as a construction-object and panel-relief, the language of New Figuration addressed the clash between *underdevelopment* and imperialism, and foreshadowed the ensuing armed clash.

Was this perhaps another false step, in the wake of a new international trend, that of Pop art and then of Minimalism or Conceptual art – that Dias also appropriated later? Oiticica's essay introducing the exhibition *Brazilian New Objectivity* [*Nova Objetividade Brasileira*] proves, with vigour, that it was

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<sup>15</sup> See footnote 7.

not.<sup>16</sup> It clarifies the process of unfoldings and overcomings, deriving from geometric abstractionism, and makes explicit its critical surpassing to result in the Brazilian New Objectivity, a synthesis of a true encounter between the arts and the country's reality. Narrative was dialectical. It validated the abstract-geometric achievements and at the same time demonstrated that the latter constituted, in synthesis and by other means, yet another chapter of enlightened or '*illustrated* ideology', which was to be overcome.<sup>17</sup>

In the key of a renewed realism, the two manifesto-exhibitions proposed the critical updating of the geometric programmes that were made anachronistic and weak before the historical challenge posed by the civil-military coup. Both comprised artistic programmes that were circumscribed to the new post-coup situation, but that were also structural and historical, for bringing a new level of *commitment*<sup>18</sup> of the arts with the general destiny. Repositioned, the fine arts, in the case of New Objectivity, began to see themselves as a system of critical accumulation, able to reflect on the country like other languages, of greater collective reach, in tradition. They thus proposed a critical visual analysis of *underdevelopment*.

The *internal causality* that unified the cultural movements consisted of the explicit articulation between the visual arts and the consciousness of underdevelopment;<sup>19</sup> an articulation which also projected the fine arts from a small circle towards a wider audience, and aroused a greater degree of reciprocity

16 See Oiticica 1967; 1997c, pp. 110–19 (with English translation); 2011c, pp. 87–101 (English translation; pp. 227–33).

17 For the '*illustrated* ideology', aligned with the 'soft awareness of backwardness', 'education automatically brings all the benefits that allow the humanisation of man and the progress of society'. See Candido 1989b, pp. 146–8; Candido 2014b, pp. 119–41. For the correlative meaning of 'floating' awareness, see *ibid.*

18 For the notion of 'commitment', see Candido 2002, pp. 98–100.

19 'Awareness of underdevelopment came after World War II and has clearly manifested itself since the 1950s'. See Candido 1989b, p. 142; Candido 2014b, pp. 119–41. For other works that propose the issue of *underdevelopment* as an indispensable mediation for the aesthetic analysis of modern Brazilian visuality, see P. Gomes 1996 (English translation: P. Gomes 1997); and also Xavier 1993 (English translation: Xavier 1997). In Pedrosa, the historical and social issue has been posed earlier than World War II, in the key of class conflict, given its organic link with the Trotskyist movement and therefore does not derive from the debates at UNECLAC [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, said CEPAL in Latin American countries], during the postwar period, which generated the notion of *underdevelopment*. For Pedrosa's specific position, in the debate somewhat related to *underdevelopment*, on Brazilian architecture and the construction of Brasília, see the first two chapters of this volume.

with the public. The use of images conveyed a new problematique: the criticism of consumerism, delayed by the previous generation – which had forgotten the division of labour, fetishism and commodity, the issue of value, etc. – in favour of the desire to industrialise the country in the image of central economies.

In Brazilian New Objectivity, heterogeneity and asymmetries that characterised the poetics of the new artworks carried a critical attention to the whole of the country, in contrast to the optimism of geometric abstraction. The focus was the investigation of *underdevelopment*. The same happened in other fields of language and, more than a visual system, the formation of a Brazilian cultural system was achieved, involving architecture, cinema, theatre, visual arts, journalism, music, poetry, etc. all in collective dialogue, due to the critique of *underdevelopment* and common resistance to the dictatorship. Critical unification entailed an unprecedented power of articulation between popular and university culture – albeit with a hamstrung trade union movement.

When the regime, after the Institutional Act No. 5, blocked the intellectual opposition and began to annihilate it, the most well-known names, and with connections abroad, went into exile. Others remained, but were excluded and cut off from a dialogue with the forms of resistance of popular culture. The reified and bureaucratised divisions of the circuits of language, which the actions between 1964 and 1969 had overcome, began to re-emerge. If music resisted better due to its organic connection with popular culture, the same could not be said of the fine arts.

Complex, contradictory, diversified, and still seldom studied, it is not possible to analyse here the dense and complex moment that came soon after (1970 and later). Summarily, it comprises links of continuity, unfolding, and radicalisation of the main lines of the Brazilian cultural system, whose main strand resisted and evolved in exile.

In Brazil, on the other hand, the panorama became more fragmented and diversified. There was resistance, of course, re-articulations, struggle for survival, actions which, despite the constant risk of being crushed, carried traces of continuity with the previous cultural system.

### The New Contemporary Heroism

On the other hand, there were signs of significant restructuring. The *dismantling* of the Brazilian visual system was being prepared. Tectonic shifts announced new times, which here should be demarcated in certain fundamental features, which have not yet been effectively discussed. Thus, there was an emphasis on works that lend themselves to the private accumulation of values,



the so-called collections. The market, driven by the income concentration of the so-called 'economic miracle' of the military period, gained unprecedented weight.

The reorganisation of the arts in Brazil began to include, in one way or another, strategies associated with the market, which began to play a new and predominant role. Thus, gallery managers, dealers and collectors assumed an active status. More than playing the role of opinion makers, now in the role of formative agents they took charge of the new Brazilian artistic process. Correlatively, two new trends emerged: 1) a new regime of internationalisation, that is, the approximation between Brazilian art and international sources in new bases; and 2) a 'system of authors' began to take shape, like a salient face or overlapped mask, eclipsing the artistic debate and the debate between works themselves.

### The New Epic: Forming Collections

The new aspects achieved hegemony and as such warrant analysis. Individualism and pragmatism stood out. Internationalisation ceased to have a collective tenor, and the verified appropriations ceased to converge according to a central tendency – as had once occurred in relation to European Concrete art, or, later, with Pop art, etc. The new internationalisation mode spread out from authorial initiatives that borrowed at their own risk symbolic loans from external forces. These flows both resulted from and mirrored fissures and increased the fragmentation of the Brazilian visual system.

The authorial regime was also restructured through the reconstitution of the artistic subject and the resumption of the contemplative aesthetic pact, so criticised earlier, either by the rationale of Concrete art at first or by the Neo-Concrete proposition of 'participation', developed to the radical negation of contemplative relations, at first in favour of physical contacts between 'participant' and work, and later in favour of 'propositions' of anti-art practices.

Once this page was turned (which still echoed the struggles of 1968 and those against the dictatorship), the return to the authorial order came to form a new chapter of the enlightened or '*illustrated*' ideology'. Thus it re-proposed, for art, the restoration of the notion of the special object, as well as the iconic figure of the artist and the importance of the wealthy art lover. In the sphere of circulation, the process evolved through the 'solo' performance, as it is called in the stage arts and in sports, in the padded environment of art galleries and *illustrated* houses, in the various meanings of the term.

In this new constellation, all became some sort of author, starting with the collector. The paradigm of political parties or fractions, which typified the general conduct of the modern avant-gardes, gave way to the paradigm of behavioural tendencies and brand identities. The new factors of the aggregation and identity of groups of artists increasingly became art galleries, clusters of new artistic families, referred to by consumption ranges and aspects of taste, as had happened previously in the USA.

### Dismantling and New Authors

Then came the scene of the *dismantling*, or the reverse of the select system of authors, through its expansion and diversification, which, for many, sounded like a multicultural achievement. The introduction of semi-adolescent authors and the return to painting, after two decades in which experimentalism had prevailed, marked the transition to the 1980s, yet without changing the logic of constitution of authors as brands desired by collectors.

The new painters came in the wake of two international movements tied by kinship, which were claimed to be non-utopian or neo-pragmatic, and whose productive restructuring passed through the rationalisation of artistic practice within the specialised commercial circuit of galleries and sectoral magazines: 'German Neo-Expressionism' and Italian 'Transavanguardia'. North American Abstract Expressionism was also alternately invoked in relation to lineage issues.

Tragic and significant coincidences were the deaths of Oiticica (1980) and Glauber Rocha (1981) – two artists who had embodied the art-society convergence: between the aesthetic avant-garde, critical *commitment* in face of so-called *underdevelopment*, and the struggle against social-economical dualisms and the dictatorship.

What were the striking differences between the emerging generation and previous ones? In it were objectified and crystallised – announcing the new times – the avoidance of collective dialogic and historical reflection. Such manoeuvres had been foreshadowed by the rise of individualist pragmatics in the previous decade, but were counterbalanced in the transition by a more rooted historical sense among artists trained in the struggles of the post-1968/69 period. Historical and totalising judgements were disregarded, although this was no longer due to external constraints, but rather resulted from the position of the aesthetic subject himself. The different positions were no longer politicised or collectivised. The mutation included authors, spectators, and the art world in general. On one hand, the *dismantling* liquidated the nexuses of meaning

between works, while, on the other hand, there was an extensive affirmation of new authors. Both constituted two simultaneous faces of one and the same historical and cultural process of the emergence of the market hegemony.

Within the framework of the liquidation of history and of the reification of market relations, as if it were the specific space of all human differences, multiculturalist demands with an exhibitionist, singularised or narcissistic grain took hold. Moreover, the affirmation of the New turned into an absolute and, in this condition, according to the bragging of the commodity, stood out. In group shows of contemporary art, having become increasingly like fairs, the extensive cacophony leads one to suppose an intense atomisation. The resources in use and the objects exhibited do not show any cohesion and are arranged as if in different orbits.

### The Empire of Circulation

How to judge the phenomenon? Does the multiplication of singularities imply a rich pluralism or, on the contrary, does it mean solipsism or even autism? Neither one nor the other. The cacophony is only apparent, since it concerns only the productive operation, long since without any restriction whatsoever. The management of circulation prevails, for which everything comes to be capitalised and the logic is only one.

In fact, despite being sectoral, the fairs present a common logic in the management of circulation as production. Instead of cacophony, there is uniformity. In this direction, the foundations stand out. The diversity of the works of deceased artists is standardised, through the common logic of the capitalisation of foundations, which preserve and manage the works according to the uniform and permanent rotation of world trademarks.

Less far than near is the day when such foundations – which are clearly growing, endowed with substantial and prestigious resources – will meet in a federation like the Syndicate of Hotels, Restaurants, Bars and Similar: the syndication of art exhibitors and host organisations, restorers and suppliers of meaning. Certainly, it will be a prosperous syndicate, since the board and executive positions of private museums and foundations are much sought-after and their executive and managerial staff grow, while the staff of public museums decrease. Examples of the process are the flourishing associations of friends of institutions, to which the administrations of museums are in practice subordinated.

In the context of the museums, the phenomenon of the absence of historical reflection, and of the dissolution of a political strategy of cultural activity, is

correlated with the regular purchase of events, like packages from 'cultural production' offices, in the form of funding and brand brokerage. In the era of institutionalisation of the business counter as a provider of culture, very few institutions still keep their own qualified technical staff or seek a defined line of action.

The phenomenon, however, is not only of the tragic extinction of art and of artists with critical ideas, as it seems to some people, but rather of restoring the notion of art as an object for contemplation and spectacle, and of reconversion and expansion of its modes of circulation. An essay published by the *Margem Esquerda* [Left Bank] journal<sup>20</sup> illustrates how art and culture today are glasshouses, vivariums for new business models.

### New Providers

In the economy-culture consortium of the country's emerging market, it was at the Banco do Brasil [Bank of Brazil] cultural centres (CCBB), paradigms of the institution-counter, where the test of the cloned development of cultural actions, based on private interest, occurred. It was the CCBBs, a laboratory body acting in Brazilian capitals, that housed, in their test tubes, the embryo of an investment and development bank of tomorrow. They acted thus as synthesisers of the so-called public-private partnerships (PPPs).

The phenomenon, however, is not unique to Brazil. It is actually general and international. Thus, in central countries, the name and operational mode of cultural institutions are leased. Thus, the Louvre has recently (2006) sealed a major partnership with the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, in fierce competition with the Emirate of Dubai which also aims to become a hub of world tourism.<sup>21</sup>

Also in the field of studies, the same logic prevails. Illustrated art books, in luxurious editions destined for collectors' libraries, have proliferated, documenting events, alongside other more solid studies that channel interpretative efforts. In one way or another, the immense majority is shaped according to the principle of authorial primacy, which eclipses, in the predication of the works exclusively to the sphere of authorship, any reflective relationship of commitment with the historical whole.

There are those who see in this *Anschluss* or mode of annexation an irresistible advance, a historical equivalent that so-called Renaissance art experi-

20 See O. Arantes 2005c, pp. 62–75.

21 See Davis 2007.

enced, liberated through money from the tutelage of the clergy and from courtesan servitude. Art and culture benefitted from the revolutionary aspects of the bourgeoisie of the time. Currently the annexation, even if voluntary, corresponds to a kiss of death. Only ephemeral meanings and sensations arise from the art and culture exhibited in mini tax havens.

In the torrent of insignificance there is, however, resistance and life, as in every human and social process. But the internal laws of art and culture lost the tenor of negativity they had accumulated when linked to the rise of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. Today they promise satisfactions equal to those of all commodities. Pseudo-civilisatory regulations and procedures are identical to those of every Occupation (by Capital). There are exceptions, but they are separate cases that do not *form* systems – these, the ones that in fact exist, are based on reconversions of tax breaks, intertwining with commodities, etc.

The holy Friedrich von Hayek prophesied the multiplication of the monetarist craftsman, able to make currency at home, and a world full of them. Was he not simply considering the flows of today's art? Today's economy is regarded as an innovative art, while art is a new and prosperous business.



## PART 2

### *From Dismantling to Struggle*







## From the Debate about Formation to Strike as Formation

To *Juan Antonio Ramírez*, in memoriam<sup>1</sup>

### How to Discuss the Crisis in Our Terms? (Madrid, January 2009)

Following Juan Antonio Ramírez's invitation, I will propose to discuss here principles and practices, criteria and processes for a historical-materialist and dialectical reflection about the arts. Juan Antonio said to me on the phone: 'This is something really missing in the debates here about art, which in general sound aphasic and apathetic when it comes to how to face the capitalist crisis'.<sup>2</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> This text is based on the notes for a conference ('Una teoría crítica de la cultura para las naciones periféricas', 21 January 2009), commissioned by professor Juan Antonio Ramírez, for a discussion in the seminar *Movimientos y Figuras del Arte Contemporáneo*, which he conducted at the department of Historia y Teoría del Arte, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM). Juan Antonio suddenly passed away on 12 September 2009. He did not have the chance to read the written version of this work, for which he vividly collaborated with his questions about the contemporary crisis and conflicts between centre and periphery, as well as his lively commitment to reconstructing historical-materialist critical processes for the study of the arts. [In this version, the text includes additional notes for publication in book form, generated from the debates raised in the several subsequent presentations].
  - <sup>2</sup> In fact, I had been originally invited at some point in 2008 to offer two specific seminars on modern art history, during four weeks, within Juan Antonio's postgraduate seminar at UAM. So, I was supposed to come to Madrid in January–February 2009 for this purpose. However, while I was preparing them, he called me in October 2008 – soon after the outbreak of the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, and the subsequent collapse of New York's financial system – asking me to combine both seminars into one, and to add an extra one with a discussion on how to face – in terms of art history – such crisis, whose global reach was immediately intuited by him. This was Juan Antonio, a man of temperament and intuitions, eager to find new ways, promptly reacting to events. When I eventually landed in early January 2009 in an abnormally cold Madrid, the first thing he invited me to do was join him in a demonstration against Israel's bombing campaigns over Palestinian hospitals and schools.

## Diagnosis

If we are to discuss the aphasia of art history when faced with general problems, it is best to do so concretely, historically synthesising and objectifying a certain critical experience. In general terms, the problem I shall propose is that of the lack of historical meaning of cultural, artistic and other acts. I will deal with the wreckage that has engulfed us all in the last 30 years, in both peripheral and core capitalist countries. In this period, we have all been subject to the hegemony of neoliberal discourses, and thus engulfed by the idea of the so-called 'pensée unique' – that is, briefly, the denial of the experience of class struggles. We came then to consider that the era of great historical ruptures had already ended under the triumph of capitalism. This view was established as a final judgement. To art, nothing was left but to allow itself to be annexed by the world of business, and in particular, fictitious capital and 'financialisation'. To genuflect to the markets, this became the watchword for the arts.

## Kissing the Hand

Two symptoms are characteristic of this process: 1) the extinction of the critical or negative function of the arts and of thought in regard to the whole of the modern historical process, frozen by the so-called 'pensée unique'; and 2) the paradigmatic, central, and innovative role played by the arts and architecture in the new businesses, especially those of finance and real estate.<sup>3</sup>

## Building a Tradition

Against such a tendency, I propose to start the discussion from a concrete experience. Precisely, to begin discussing what, in Brazil, was referred to as the question of *formation*. Thus, this presupposes that we carry out a critical and historical diagnosis of a peripheral situation and address the conditions of an autonomous process of *formation*.

It is clear to me that the historical phase of the so-called national *formation*, concomitant with the process of creation of national markets, has gone into rapid decline since the advent of neoliberalism's dominance. This originated the complex of symptoms that in Brazil we call *dismantling* [desmanch].

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3 See O. Arantes 2005c.

Its critical overcoming will certainly not occur according to the political parameters that permeated the discussion of the formative processes, which were once combined with peripheral modernisation as well as its dialectical criticism. But let us leave current issues for later.

I suggest that we understand the meaning of the term *formation* as the building of a tradition. But beware that in this case tradition does not have a restorative or conservative sense; rather, it has a modernising and even radically transformative one. In Brazil, it was a matter of *inventing* a tradition, for a conjuncture without one, and therefore in a process of change.

In other words, the problematique of *formation* or, as modernist writer Mário de Andrade put it, the act of '*traditionalising* (if I may use this neologism) the present',<sup>4</sup> that is, of outlining a past based on a present, consisted of a problematique conceived by Brazilian modern art, and thus it was combined with the same ruptures and transformations that the latter sought to unleash.

### Studies on Formation

From the 1930s to the 1950s, the theme of *formation* absorbed the most startling essays and works realised in Brazil in the arts and humanities. Such a trend derived directly from the intellectual renewal propelled by the anti-oligarchic reformist movement called 'Revolution of 1930' – foreshadowed, in certain aspects, by several lieutenants uprisings [*movimentos tenentistas*], from 1922 onwards.

The question of formation was linked to widespread concern with the building of the nation. This was outlined as an intellectual programme, of which Oswald de Andrade's 'Cannibalist Manifesto' [*Manifesto Antropófago*], published in May 1928, in the first number of *Revista de Antropofagia* [*Anthrophagic Journal*]<sup>5</sup> was a landmark. What is the historical-social formation that goes by the name of Brazil? Where does it come from and where is it going? This is what the artists and intellectuals of the generation formed in the wake of the *tenentistas* uprising and subsequently the so-called 'Revolution of 1930' asked themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The first works about the issue of *formation* emerged in the 1930s. In *The Masters and the Slaves* [*Casa-Grande & Senzala*, 1933], sociologist Gilberto

4 See M. Andrade 1983, pp. 18–19, *apud* Schwarz 1999d, p. 48, footnote 1.

5 O. Andrade 1928, pp. 3, 7; English translation: O. Andrade 1991, pp. 38–47.

6 See Candido 1989c, pp. 181–98. See also Candido 1969, pp. XI–XXII; republished in Candido 1980b, pp. 135–52; English translation: Candido 2012, pp. XXI–XXXV.

Freyre, using a modernist diction close to oral discourse, as well as empirical observations and other elements of Anglo-Saxon sociology and anthropology, studied patriarchal sexual practices during the slave system.<sup>7</sup> Historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda made a typological study in *Roots of Brazil* [*Raízes do Brasil*, 1936].<sup>8</sup> Based on a backdrop of Weberian ideas with which Holanda became acquainted during his stay as a journalistic correspondent in Berlin (1929–31), the book scrutinised, in a startling and dialectical way, the Brazilian social roots in the colonial process.<sup>9</sup> And, to complete the founding totem of the *formation* debate, historian Caio Prado Jr. developed in his precursory work in ‘decolonisation’ studies, *The Colonial Background of Modern Brazil* [*Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, 1942], a dialectic-materialist<sup>10</sup> analysis of the colonial system. Thus, referring to Portuguese America, he affirmed that its colonial system was formed exclusively to supply goods to the European market.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, from the 1930s onwards, the most critical, inventive, and committed Brazilian intellectuals elaborated the decisive premise that the question had never been to constitute a society in Portuguese America, but rather an advanced productive unit – which, in fact, was achieved in terms of profitability. Slave trade from Africa to Portuguese America was the most profitable business in the world while it lasted.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the production of sugar and gold, which placed the commodities of the Portuguese colony among the paradigms of profitability in the European market of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were unthinkable without the slave trade.

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7 Freyre 1966.

8 Holanda 1969; English translation: Holanda 2012.

9 On the dialectical tenor of the typological construction of *Roots of Brazil*, see the prefatory essay in Candido 1969, 1980b; English translation: Candido 2012.

10 Prado Jr. 2000; English translation: Prado Jr. 1967.

11 ‘If we look for the vital element in Brazil’s formation, the element that lies at the very roots of its subsequent growth, we will find it in the fact that the colony was established to provide sugar, tobacco, and certain other commodities; later gold and diamonds; then cotton; and later still coffee for the European market. [Nothing else, but this].’ (The last sentence, in square brackets, was omitted in the English translation from 1967. I have reintroduced it, according to the Brazilian edition, LRM). See Prado Jr. 2000, p. 20; English translation: Prado Jr. 1967, p. 21.

12 See Alencastro 2000.

## Malaise

Since the critical advances made after the aforementioned 'Revolution of 1930', the historical problematique of *formation* has gained in relevance, acquiring the sense of 'studies on decolonisation'.

Please note the fact that it is a question of the *formation* of a society as a *future objective*, since the nation, in this case, did not actually exist. The malaise revealed in the idea that Brazil was less than a nation, or even than an already formed society, had its roots in a rarely acknowledged trauma. This was due to the country having become the largest and longest lasting complex of forced labour, and the greatest imprisonment machine, in Western history. It is enough to compare the scale of the monstrosities of Dachau, Auschwitz and other extermination camps, whose atrocities lasted less than 15 years, with the permanent genocide of Africans in Brazilian captivity. This was carried out all over the territory, unrestrainedly, including domestic spaces – not only in Portuguese America, but also in the so-called independent Brazil, thus, in sum, over the five centuries of white and capitalist despotism. Such genocide endures through the incessant killing of young people by state military police, and mass incarceration in prisons that are in reality almost like a new kind of *senzalas* [slave quarters]. With the exception of Machado de Assis's nineteenth-century writings, almost nothing was said about such malaise. Nevertheless, we still suffer from this illness.<sup>13</sup> The issue remains unresolved and has yet to undergo a working-through.

## Decolonisation, Formation, Criticism of Underdevelopment

Returning to the modernists, Caio Prado and others viewed Brazil as a country structured according to dualisms established in the colonial process. In this perspective, however, the debate developed in the 1950s brought a new gamut of meanings to the problematique of *formation*. Thus, the UNECLAC (UN Economic Commission for Latin America, said CEPAL in Latin American countries), led by Argentine economist Raul Prebisch, assisted by the decisive theoretical collaboration of Brazilian economist Celso Furtado, demonstrated the continuous surplus transfer as an obstacle to the accumulation of capital in peripheral countries, and highlighted the 'issue of *underdevelopment*' as a specific historical formation with its own problematique.

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13 See Schwarz 1987b, pp. 115–25.

Decolonisation and *formation* began to be understood then as modes related to *criticism* and the *overcoming of underdevelopment*. Since then, the three notions – *decolonisation*, *formation*, *underdevelopment* – have become inextricably intertwined. It was on the basis of this perspective that literary critic and historian Antonio Candido, in his 1962 preface to the reprint of *Formação da Literatura Brasileira* (1959),<sup>14</sup> affirmed that if foreigners expected from Brazilian and other Latin American literatures the presentation of exotic themes, it was because they considered that addressing the ‘fundamental problems of man’ was a ‘privilege of the old literatures’. If we accepted this, he affirmed, it would be the same as accepting that one told us ‘we should export coffee, cocoa or rubber, leaving the industry for those who historically originated it’.<sup>15</sup>

### Import Substituting

The metaphor and the comparison were not fortuitous. Brazil, like many other countries of colonial origin, was then immersed in the project of building its industrial autonomy and reaching the goal thus called ‘import substitution’. Clearly, in this perspective, foreign trade was not viewed as a horizon of opportunities or a natural solution for development, but rather as a bottleneck where what was commonly termed ‘international losses’ occurred.

Where did such ideas come from? Precisely from criticism of the colonial process. Being a colony meant being doomed to the damnation of international trade, delivering the main natural or semi-manufactured goods of the country (brazilwood, sugar, gold, cocoa, coffee, etc.) to foreign consumption, withdrawing them from the usufruct of Brazilians and importing all the rest (food, clothing, fuels, culture and machinery) according to prices established in central countries.

### Class Alliances

Let us return to the terms of the debate on *formation*. As can be seen in Candido’s argument against the privilege of old literatures – which sought to monopolise the fundamental problems of man, leaving exotic or particular subjects

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14 Candido 2006d.

15 Candido 2006c, p. 19.

to the young ones – the problematique of *formation*, which unfolded in the constitution of specific cultural systems, by the 1950s, became equivalent – for the group of authors implied in it – to the creation of an ‘internal market’ and to the building of an autonomous industrial complex. In this way, the problematique of *formation* came to mean something like the ‘import substitution’ programme, which included, besides economic goals, political and social values. In cinema, this programme involved in particular the building of a national film industry; similarly, as far as the visual arts were concerned, a circuit of art museums and large institutions was set up, like the São Paulo Art Biennial. At times, such actions and goals provided alliances between intellectuals, artists, and certain ‘enlightened’ circles of the bourgeoisie.

This was precisely the moment in which the dominant visual ideology in several South American countries consisted of geometric abstraction, in contrast to what happened in the North American context, focused on abstract expressionism. Geometric abstraction prevailed first in Argentina and Uruguay, and then migrated to Brazil, Venezuela and Chile, also conquering its own spaces in Mexico, which was then coming from a very strong muralist tradition. The works of Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, which became international milestones in the last decades,<sup>16</sup> emerge from this process.

The modernising goal of industrial autonomy provided heterogeneous alliances and was shared in Brazil by the left and right (albeit with differences in interpretation and emphasis). The right, which led economic policies during the military dictatorship, viewed the country as an exporting industrial power, politically rigid and organised like a forced labour camp.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the left viewed industrial autonomy as directly related to the constitution of an internal mass market and to an expanded democracy, a result of the agrarian reform and of income distribution. The current [2009] President of the Republic Lula – a former metallurgical worker politically formed in the trade union practice of negotiations with the multinational automotive industry – is the expression of the conciliation between the two industrialist programmes, as well as of national renunciation derived from what today is the *dismantling*.<sup>18</sup>

16 See Oiticica 1997g. See also Ramírez 2007. On L. Clark, see, among others, Rolnik and Diserens 2005.

17 The goal of industrialisation was also maintained and implemented by the dictatorship, with variations, to the point where, in the mid-1970s, the production chain installed in Brazil was responsible for up to nearly 96 percent of the manufactured products consumed in the country.

18 See Oliveira 2003a. See also Kurz 1992.

## Cultural Systems

Let us deepen the issue of the *formation* of cultural systems as a parallel process analogous to the building of industrial autonomy. Proposed as the objective in different areas, the issue of *formation* of cultural systems corresponded, as can be deduced, to the *formation* of the nation. However, today we are plunged into a different problematique, that of the *dismantling* – to which new conflicts and political agents also correspond.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, before addressing the current situation, it is crucial to go through the concrete critical determination of how one previously understood *formation* or the issues of decolonisation and the symbolical-cultural founding of the nation.

Let us therefore deal with the theme of the specific laws of the ‘*formation* of cultural systems’. The establishment of formative laws began with a critical diagnosis of the mental habits derived from colonisation – a diagnosis that implied a critical reading of the asymmetries between nations, as was the case with Trotsky’s ‘law of uneven and combined development’ about the world economic system in the imperialist era.

It was observed that mental life in the colony pointed towards recurrent symptoms that still exist: the intermittency of cultural fashions. Thus, the analysis pointed to the volubility of ideas as a repetitive behaviour, a generalised intellectual neurosis.<sup>20</sup> The diagnosis of such a pathology created as desideratum the establishment of an ‘*internal causality*’, which, in Candido’s words, would imply the constitution of a dynamic of its own between three constitutive cores of the cultural process: authors, works, and public. According to this criterion, if the three instances did not regularly and reciprocally interact, there would be no *formation* and no system.<sup>21</sup>

Let us discuss this contraposition. What did such notions imply? What did the volubility and intermittency of cultural fashions entail? Literary critic Sílvio Romero had already observed in the nineteenth century:

In the history of the spiritual development of Brazil there is a gap to be considered: the lack of serialisation of ideas, the absence of a genetics

19 See P. Arantes 2004, pp. 25–77. See also Schwarz 1999f, pp. 155–62 and 1999g, pp. 182–8.

20 For the notion of *volubility* as an aesthetic characteristic linked to the Brazilian social structure, see Schwarz 1990 (English translation: Schwarz 2001), and 1999h, pp. 220–6.

21 On the notions of *formation* and *system*, see Candido 2006a, 2006c, pp. 11–20; 2002, pp. 93–120.



... one author does not proceed from another; a system is not the consequence of something which preceded it.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the dependence of authors and cultural agents from the greater prestige of foreign works and authors corresponds to the urgency of the elites to be guided by the external market, leading them to constantly revise models and acts in light of the latest fashions and extravagances of the central economies. The consequence is the incessant exchange of references, without critical reflection or intense debate, motivated by the mere desire to be current and recognised abroad, as a cosmopolitan.

### Feeling of Opposites

Let us move on to another point of the diagnosis. Another symptom of cultural colonisation, which concretely determines the mode of being of peripheral volubility, is the duality or compensatory oscillation between 'localism and cosmopolitanism'. It is a matter 'sometimes of the premeditated and at times violent affirmation of literary nationalism ...; other times of the declared conformism, of the conscious imitation of European patterns'.<sup>23</sup>

The determination of the pendular movement or of the cyclothymia of peripheral mental habits is crucial in the theory of *formation*, since it places such theory as a critical perspective in face of nationalist manifestations and the idealist illusion of greater authenticity, which is frequently attributed to such manifestations. The denomination of 'localist de-repression',<sup>24</sup> to refer to national and supposedly authentic cultural manifestations, is very revealing of the critical distance of Antonio Candido from the cyclical outbreaks of cultural nationalism.

In contrast to the search for national roots and the illusion of authenticity, the theory of *formation*, according to Candido, prioritises the 'feeling of opposites' or the 'feeling of dialectics', that is, seeking 'to see in each tendency the opposite component, so as to apprehend reality in the most dynamic manner, which is always dialectical'.<sup>25</sup>

22 See Romero 1969, p. 32, apud P. Arantes 1998, p. 15.

23 See Candido 2006e, p. 117.

24 See Candido 2006e, p. 129. The term 'de-repression [*des-recalque*]' is used by the critic in the sense of an uncontrolled outburst; it evokes the Freudian meaning.

25 See Candido 1989a, p. 164.

The 'feeling of opposites' is rooted in the constitution of a historical point of view – an angle currently absent from contemporary formulations. The dialectical apprehension of the different functions of domination, exerted by cultural forms in the historical process, allows the determination of the dialectical rupture in the original function of domination. It is precisely the moment of inflection in which a cultural form brought by the dominator is appropriated by the dominated.<sup>26</sup> Form begins to exercise a new function and acquires new meanings. It is such a process of rupture and appropriation that ultimately enables the constitution of '*internal causality*'.

### Historical-Cultural Function

It is important to note that the question of determination of the historical-cultural function implies not only the establishment of a historical point of view, but also criticism of the idea of aesthetic autonomy. An idea that presupposes, according to disinterested rationalist contemplation, present in Kant, the non-functional character of artworks. That is, their dichotomous distinction from the domain of material and practical interests. As is known, the ideal of aesthetic autonomy has become a cliché in the central countries ever since the *Aufklärung*, and still to this day occupies a common discursive place.

On the other hand, it may be assumed that in countries of colonial origin there were historical reasons for one to be less deceived by such illusion; the illusory space of mental freedom was smaller or even non-existent in the colonies. Thus, ideas and works emerged historically linked to the colonial process or to opposing movements. A more constant concern in decolonisation was to determine who had put a work into circulation, what were the implied interests, and what was the moment of rupture within such determinations.

The ambiguities and complexities of such situations are captured in the acute formula (1973) of film critic Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes:

We are neither Europeans nor North Americans. Lacking an original culture, nothing is foreign to us because everything is. The painful construction of ourselves develops within the rarefied dialectic of not being and being someone else.<sup>27</sup>

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26 In Candido's words: 'there is a fundamental moment in the American cultural process: it is the moment in which we are able to appropriate the cultures of those who dominate us, of those who crushed the previous cultures'. See Candido 1980a, *apud* Candido 2002.

27 See P. Gomes 1996, p. 90; English translation: P. Gomes 1997, p. 263.

### Unequal and Combined Modes

Finally, if the idea of *formation*, such as the idea of an industrial or productive form of autonomy, implied, according to various authors, a generic sense of redemption, the same does not apply to Candido's historical-materialist description. In the latter, according to 'unequal and combined' standards, the peripheral elites develop themselves 'without being accompanied by the rest of the country'.<sup>28</sup> The cultural system can therefore *form itself* without assuming a general cohesion of society. *Formation* of the literary system, of which the work of Machado de Assis constituted a decisive index, coexisted with slavery. As Roberto Schwarz's historical-materialist critique, in tune with the critique of Candido, made explicit:

The part of the Brazilian elite interested in literature was able to reach a considerable degree of mental organisation, to the point of producing masterpieces, without this implying that the society from which this elite benefits reaches an appreciable degree of civility. In this sense, it is a matter ... of a progress according to the Brazilian way, with very considerable accumulation for the elite, and without greater change of the colonial iniquities.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, modern Brazilian architecture forged some of the world's architectural paradigms and even won two Pritzker prizes (Oscar Niemeyer in 1988 and Paulo Mendes da Rocha in 2006), without the labour condition at building sites substantially differing from semi-slavery situations. Thus, the same standard which is still found in the labour practices in rural areas is the very same that civil construction incorporated into the city, turning bricklayers into equivalents of the poorest peasants.

This is a characteristic contradiction of the peripheral situation: productive excellence, traditional in several agricultural sectors and equally in the production of certain cultural goods, is inextricably linked to the asymmetries of power inherent in the semi-colonial condition.

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<sup>28</sup> See Schwarz 1999d, p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> See Schwarz 1999d, p. 55.

## Two Illusions, with a Past but without a Future

A historical parallel can be drawn. The ideal of *formation* was, for peripheral societies, just as the *Aufklärung* was for the monarchies and central countries, an amalgam of critical and emancipationist values. However, the documents of the *Aufklärung* today evince both its ideals and the signs of barbarism it involved, as well as the impossibility of realising its ideals within the framework of capitalism.<sup>30</sup> The historical objective of late *formation*, although updated in view of the issues of *underdevelopment*, reflects similar problems. The desires of *formation* and industrialisation were combined. At the same time, the perspective and the questions of class, labour and racial segregation were less apparent in the debate on *formation*.<sup>31</sup>

Inventive and radical experiments in the arts, theatre and cinema, by Hélio Oiticica, Zé Celso Martinez and Glauber Rocha, shortly after 1964, incorporated the discussion on slavery, Africanisms, and other neglected issues into the focus of the cultural debate on *formation*. But they were interrupted by the dictatorship, and then rarely and insufficiently resumed, except in popular music, given its organic links with African origins.

## Scarce Truths

Thus, the issue of industrial labour scarcely appeared in the recent visual arts tradition in Brazil, starting from the early 1950s.<sup>32</sup> In other words, since then – that is to say, during the period of modernisation and industrialisation – labour issues hardly came to the fore in visual arts, despite the fact that the efforts of industrialisation were carried out as a national programme.

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30 See Adorno and Horkheimer 1985.

31 See Candido 2004b, pp. 227–40, for testimonials by Antonio Candido on the themes of slavery and free labour, as well as on Roger Bastide's pioneering research into the consequences of slavery in Brazil, especially Bastide 2001a and 2001b, and comparable research by Florestan Fernandes, mainly Fernandes 1965 and 1972. See also Fernandes 1996, pp. 209–15. By prioritising the issue of slave labour, the extra-academic research of Jacob Gorender is another notable exception, questioning the guiding principle of studies on formation over the colonial system. See Gorender 1978.

32 The 1930s generation focused on labour issues, often through mural paintings and engravings. Nevertheless, that occurred mainly under the aspect of rural or non-industrial labour in the cities. Thus, the real issue broadly at stake was Brazil's backwardness.

One remarkable exception was the case of the work, against the grain, of sculptor Amilcar de Castro, who stood out from geometric abstraction by the anti-formalist emphasis he placed on the clash between planned action and the resistance of matter.

In addition to such an outstanding achievement in the field of sculpture, the work of engraver Arthur Piza constituted an equally notable exception. Thus it goes against the tradition of Brazilian engraving, chiefly artisanal and narrative. In contrast, in Piza's work, there is a systematic reflection focusing on the rhythmic and metabolic qualities of the repetitive experience of work, whose gestures, despite everything, are rescued and revived in face of the weight of serial logic.

Another clear exception in the following generation of the contemporary visual arts can be seen in the intrinsic and long-term commitment to the sphere of labour in the oeuvre of Carmela Gross, which develops a continuous cartography or survey of living labour in an industrial and commercial centre like São Paulo.

However, such exceptions notwithstanding, the Brazilian standard practice is to not give a voice to labour experiences.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the debate about *formation*, while it has dialectically caused the emergence of research focusing on more radical questions – sometimes even of class, in one way or another – never ceased to be a theoretical project fundamentally guided by a supraclassist and reformist point of view. Antonio Candido, with lucidity and frankness, has more than once referred to this perspective as 'radical middle-class thinking'.<sup>34</sup>

Notwithstanding such a limit of origin, the affirmation of the collective sense of intellectual activity, as well as the strategic role attributed to the historical function exercised by the works – two decisive critical constructs of the *formation* debate – have effectively constituted themselves as formative criteria or models for generations of researchers in Brazil. These criteria or models were thus consolidated as crucial and decisive reflexive achievements,

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33 See Chapter 2, in this volume. It should also be noted that after 1964 the most radical and critically innovative Brazilian social reflection was developed in exile: the Marxist theory of dependency, written by Ruy Mauro Marini, Vânia Bambirra and Theotonio dos Santos, which had as one of its core ideas the notion of 'labour overexploitation'. However, due to the exile and the prevailing conservatism in Brazilian universities, the Marxist current of the theory of dependency remains to this day better known and debated in Hispanic America and in central economies – where it found interlocutors in the fields of economy and sociology such as A. Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi – than in Brazil, where it remained marginal.

34 See, for example, Candido 1974, pp. 9–23.

like the debate on *underdevelopment* and *dependence* in peripheral or old colonial countries. Thus, they have become quite operative for the critical struggle against capitalism and its mercantile conception – contemplative and solipsistic or useless – of culture as fetish and transcendence.

### Dismantling and Its Criticism

But moreover, alongside the aforementioned complex historical issues of late modernisation, the sharp contemporary question of *dismantling* now appears and mingles with them. As to what the *dismantling* concerns, a clear and symptomatic feature in our social formations is the abandonment of the reflective historical judgement.

Now, such judgement, alongside other factors, engendered the ideal of *formation*. When we come to the abandonment of such a judgement, as well as of the critical proposition of the future as some kind of a project very distinct from today's reality, what does it mean and imply? Not only a declared state of emergency, but also the permanent establishment of a regime without any priority save that of 'every man for himself', under the law of the jungle.<sup>35</sup>

I have presented to you the problem to which the diagnosis of *dismantling* responds. This diagnosis and the urgency of the reflection about what it implies today motivated the creation, at the University of São Paulo (USP), of the DESFORMAS study centre (literally meaning Dismantling and Formation of Symbolic Systems), which gathers an interdisciplinary collective of researchers.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, to conclude, I would like to stress, as a testimony but also to trigger further debate, two ideas that are at the root of the DESFORMAS study centre. The first is that one cannot effectively research and analyse by accepting disciplinary limits, each taken in isolation. On the contrary, it is essential to constitute articulated approaches in view of a historical, synthetic, and totalising reflection.

This inscribes the research concerns of the members of DESFORMAS against, among other things, the tide of a hegemonic model of historiographic reflection on the visual arts, current in Brazil. Such a model is based on the exclusive reference to authors as a source of meaning. Authorial mythology goes hand in hand with the intellectual division of labour, reified in specialisa-

35 See P. Arantes 2007a, pp. 153–65.

36 See <https://desformas.org/>.

tions. However, this perspective, formerly attached to the author's singularity, only manages to produce genealogies, traces of influence and other fetishes, without critically overcoming the apparent state of fragmentation and reification through which the logic of the market imposes itself as a seemingly unsurpassable second nature.

### Strike as Formation

The second key idea at the root of the foundation of the DESFORMAS centre is the following: research and reflection are indissociable from concrete struggles. DESFORMAS was born out of the political and collective support of a group of teachers and researchers to the movement of the strike and occupation of the central building of USP's rectory, in May and June 2007.

The movement was led primarily by USP's officials and manual workers, as well as students. They all fought against the decrees of the São Paulo state government, then under PSDB politician José Serra (2007–10), who already visualised his presidential candidacy as coordinating an economic and political bloc mostly aligned with international capital and a neoliberal programme. The decrees subjected the public university and research funding to a programme associated with private corporations.<sup>37</sup> For 50 days, the rectory remained in the hands of the strikers – despite the frequent threats made by authorities and members of a certain local *Versailles*, including several University 'barons' who, in their declarations or articles for the bourgeois mainstream media, called for an imminent military police invasion of the campus. However, the occupants' resistance was maintained and finally a negotiated de-occupation was achieved without a police invasion of the campus.

A six-week cycle of conferences, *Culture of Strike: Occupying is Formation* [*Cultura da Greve: Ocupação é Formação*],<sup>38</sup> was held in the main auditorium of the University Council, then under occupation. The experience of presenting regular research to a mobilised and struggling public is at the root of the foundation of the DESFORMAS centre. There, the challenge was summed up in the common question that all lecturers had to face: what to do with intellectual activity in a university and society that is *dismantling*?

In fact, we have nothing more than the alternative of rescuing the future from the hands of those who have confiscated it from the huge social majority,

37 See *Margem Esquerda* 2007, pp. 77–102.

38 See <http://finetanks.com/eventos/culturadegreve/>; see also Martins 2007b, p. A26.

leaving to the latter no other feeling than that of a permanent state of emergency. Nothing is left to the majority but to struggle. Such is the beginning of a new era. The time of *dismantling* is the clear and unstoppable time of class struggle without respite, and of the self-organisation of the working classes, without conciliatory illusions.



## The Indignity of São Paulo\*

### Latifundia Manners

The strength of the latifundia system permeates many and varied aspects of Brazilian order. It also pervades the cultural sphere with perspectives, values, and habits engendered in the *casas-grandes*.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon became so widespread that it gained a sort of naturalness and mingled with what is currently considered Brazilian.

The country of sugar and alcohol, of coconut, coffee, commodities, and industry – even the aeronautical one – is, first and foremost, the country of latifundia. Hence, it is the country of slavery and super-exploitation – elevated to core principles, even of the ‘current republic-form’, said to be ‘for all’ (under the PT [so-called Worker’s Party] administration, 2012) – as was the principle of ‘the good’ and also the ‘light’ itself, according to the paradigmatic republic, in Plato’s philosophy.

Historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda warned about the issue in *Roots of Brazil* (1936) and the fundamental terms of his diagnosis remain valid.<sup>2</sup> Frequently, even the manifestations apparently most distant from the rural order (like the implantation of modern architecture in Brazilian cities, as well as the semi-jazzy melody and the *bossa-nova*’s lyric – *cool*, urban and middle-class) despite everything, reproduce values – like class segregation, intra-peer conciliation, and aversion to work – deriving from the migration of the latifundia culture to the environment of the cities and liberal professions. The latter, often controlled by minds that see themselves as devoted to the free cultivation of forms.

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\* I borrowed for the title a playful and sarcastic phrase, motivated by the recurring violations of social rights and ignominies of various kinds (‘incidentally’, ever increasing) brought forth as a matter of administrative routine at the University of São Paulo (USP). An administration, moreover, which is installed at the campus as a colonial authority appointed by the State Governor. The pun plays with the spoken similarity between the words ‘*universidade*’ (university) and ‘*indignidade*’ (indignity). Credit for the wordplay goes to a witty colleague from the USP’s Brazilian Literature department, José Antonio Pasta Jr.

1 This is the Portuguese term for the large rural houses of the latifundia. Until 1888, the landowner was usually also a slave owner.

2 Holanda 1969, p. 50; Holanda 2012, p. 43.

Even Brazil's urban fabric itself does not present anything but modes of occupation of the soil that are hybrid or derived from the rural environment. This is reproduced both in its richest forms (that of garden suburbs – increasingly protected by gunmen), as well as in the poorest, deprived of the city essentials. There, in the city periphery, stands out the memory of the disorder typical of the empire of money, based on the exclusion of all kinds of workers' rights, as dictated by the latifundia.

### **The Indignity of São Paulo**

The so-called University of São Paulo (USP) constitutes a greater example of the permanent power of the latifundia in the Brazilian order. It was founded in 1934 by sectors from the coffee agribusiness. These aimed to resume by other means the counterrevolution of 1932, that had been militarily defeated by the central government, derived from the 'Revolution of 1930'. Thus, such a university – the USP – was conceived with its back to the country and against it. Strictly speaking, it was founded according to ostensibly anti-national, anti-workers and anti-peasant perspectives – and thus, like the interests of export monoculture, it focused primarily on the values of the bourgeoisie of central economies.

The faculty of philosophy was supposed to function as the centre of human science studies, whose primary function should be integrating the university. However, when observing the process in retrospect, in view of the facts as seen from today's vantage point, the goal of the founding process appears to be to cut off – by hiring only foreign professors – all links with the terms and issues of the national cultural process – which, despite numerous obstacles and problems, had been taking shape in specific and distinct patterns, regardless of metropolitan cultures. The best examples of such cultural independence were the works of writers Machado de Assis, in the nineteenth century, and, at the time of the creation of the USP, Mário de Andrade, who was then fully active and productive not only in the field of literature, but also as a researcher of Brazilian popular culture and folklore. Mário, it can be said, had himself become a 'living university and museum', combining research in anthropology, ethnology, oral myths, popular cultures, colonial architecture, music and literature. In some ethnologic-anthropologic expeditions into the inland of several Brazilian regions, he recorded songs and collected ethnologic materials that would have completely disappeared without his intervention.

Notwithstanding this extensive contribution, neither he nor others among the São Paulo modernists – in spite of all their family ties and proximity to the

large landowning families of São Paulo – were admitted to USP's staff of teachers and researchers. Thus, the two main modernist writers, the aforementioned Mário de Andrade as well as Oswald de Andrade, were only allowed to enter USP after becoming inanimate and as objects of study.<sup>3</sup>

The case of USP – the intellectual matrix of the Institutional Act No. 5 and of the repressive system of the dictatorship, a constant supplier of officers, executives, and intellectuals to the high-ranks and hierarchical positions of the military dictatorship, as well as to the neoliberal cycle of transition and adjustment soon after – is arguably the most aberrant example of the authoritarianism and racial segregation of the Brazilian intellectual order. Moreover, in doing this, USP does not diverge from the normal and current pattern within the institutions of Brazilian high culture. Truly, USP's standards are only the tip of the iceberg which freezes at its base aspirations and rights to higher critical education and to the reflective formation of the large majorities, in order to rip off their political voice and their very own rights.

### Seeking Social Substance

However, there are exceptions to the Brazilian standard of cultural-historical segregation and educational exclusion: the aforementioned Mário de Andrade's main expeditions to collect and study aspects of popular culture (1928, 1938); the brief but vigorous activity of the Popular Centre of Culture (Centro Popular de Cultura), of the National Union of Students (União Nacional dos Estudantes (UNE)) during the administration of Jango (president João Goulart 1961–4) – which bred the Cinema Novo, the new theatre (Arena, Oficina, and others), and the convergence of university youth with samba and with the culture of popular resistance; and, last but not least, Hélio Oiticica's turning point, in resistance to the military coup of 1964. In it, Hélio critically closed the symbolic cycle of geometric abstraction, as he sought new interlocutors on the *Morro da Mangueira* [Mangueira hill].<sup>4</sup>

3 On an informal invitation that Mario de Andrade received in 1944, ten years after the university was founded, to apply for the chair of Brazilian Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of USP, and the backstage manoeuvres of this competition, to which Oswald de Andrade had applied (without success), see the account by Antonio Candido (also unsuccessful in his application), in Candido 2004c, pp. 261–5.

4 If the end of the cycle of geometric abstraction did not actually occur, inasmuch as the formalists (such as the sculptor Sérgio Camargo and others) continued their course of work, there was, at the same time, the emergence of a new critical and expressive problematic,

In these terms, Oiticica irrigated the Brazilian visual arts with a social substance, combined with a systematising political reflection. Unfortunately, the visual arts never reached that same level again. The three initiatives – by Mário de Andrade, by the CPC, and by Hélio Oiticica – in one way or another, intertwined and nourished one another and, despite representing historically minor tendencies in their specific areas, they constituted the matrix of the qualitatively most lively and enduring achievements in Brazilian culture up to the present.

### Cultural Genocide

In summary, the political and cultural combination between some forms of the tradition linked to self-organisation of popular resistance, and fragments of so-called 'higher culture' and some university sectors constituted, in fact, the primary source for the creation of the real nucleus of Brazilian reflective and expressive life. Everything that still holds some validity in such spheres of the so-called 'higher culture' has that same origin, borrowed in some degree from 'popular culture'; while all else – that is, what comes from the so-called 'patronage', or from the cultural initiatives of the high and middle classes – suffers from the intrinsic anaemia and sterility so characteristic of the peripheral ruling classes.

Just a brief glance around suffices: the São Paulo Art Biennial, museums of modern art and others, universities (USP in the first instance), former major newspapers, publishing houses, cultural institutes – in short, everything created by private means and the country's great fortunes have a short active life. In less than a single generation, they end up in a state of disrepute, in a process of dismantling, and finally even physically in ruins.

The current scrapping of USP is blatant and the eagerness to cover it up by removing buildings and relocating units of the campus is primarily a plot and laundering operation, not only of financial resources, but of the vestiges of a segregation policy and of a cultural crime: the organised genocide of the majority's rights to formation and higher education. The *vestibular*<sup>5</sup> is a gas chamber against social and collective rights to education.

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brought about by the works of the New Figuration [Nova Figuração] and Brazilian New Objectivity [Nova Objetividade Brasileira]. Several texts in this volume address the issue. In this regard, see Chapters 4, 6, 9 and 13.

5 Entrance examination required for admission at the public and unpaid universities.

### Counter-Dismantling, a War of Resistance on Many Fronts

A large number of USP professors, teachers and researchers turned their back on the majority of the country to such a degree that their aphasia and apathy are no longer surprising. Their indifference has become routine – despite the constant commitment of the USP Teachers' Association (ADUSP) to the mobilisation of its constituency. One after another, the rectors of USP have been doing their best to plot nefarious measures, increasingly linked to the privatisation of education and research, and to the militarisation of the campuses. There is no adequate response from the teaching category. Partial resistance strikes, yes; but when they occur, they are limited mainly to the human sciences programmes plus the university hospital, students refectory and similar services. They are often bitterly rejected by other teachers, many of whom have established other careers outside the university. The political apathy and atomisation of the teaching staff, as ways of decomposition, reflect the rapid *dismantling* of the university.

However, in contrast to the teachers' political lethargy (or coma?), the USP's Workers' Union (SINTUSP) and student movements have become the main focus of defence of public education. They have been occupying more and more political spaces, as well as fostering dialogues with other social forces and political players.

In the framework of this process, a few weeks ago (it was May 2012 when I was asked to write this text for the *Contra Maré* journal<sup>6</sup>), a group of students from the Visual Arts programme of the USP's School of Communication and Arts decided to conclude the activities of a discipline (dedicated to the critical study of the after-effects of colonialism) with field research in Embu das Artes and surrounding areas. The course had been suspended on 8 November 2011 at the unleashing of the students' strike, due to the occupation of the USP's main campus by a 400-strong military police troop equipped with helicopters, dogs, horses, and machine guns.

### Forbidden Areas of Research and What Cannot Even be Mentioned

The objective of the research was to have direct contact with two of the most emblematic examples of the intrinsic duality of Brazilian cities: first, an obser-

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6 A journal of a student political tendency. Subsequently, the article was also reproduced by the journal of another student tendency. See Martins 2012.

vation visit in the morning to the encampment of Novo Pinheirinho, set up by families that are part of the Movement of Homeless Workers (MTST). Then, in the afternoon, another stage of the research, this time, at the former Jesuit convent, in the historic district of Embu, now housing a sacred art museum and a chapel, Rosário, listed for preservation by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN). The chapel holds pictorial vestiges of the period in which the Portuguese State was annexed by the Spanish Crown. Thus, it bespeaks a paradigmatic moment in which the colonial process in South America was in fact and officially unified under the same form-empire.

The two opposite poles of the colonial process, which the so-called independent Brazil *inherited* and reproduced, were thus exposed – that of the Empire and the *Quilombo*,<sup>7</sup> so to speak – like two stripped electrical wires. Thus, it was a rare opportunity to observe through a concrete comparative study anti-thetical modes of territorial occupation and the establishment of sociability in the somehow proto-urban space. On the one hand, self-organised popular resistance and spontaneity.<sup>8</sup> On the other, the afternoon's observation of traces of the remaining Jesuit convent redoubt against Indian attacks, today converted into a museum, of the Jesuit project of colonisation, catechesis and domination.

The aim of the field research was to reconsider, in light of two concrete cases, the social shock described by several key authors of the Brazilian critical tradition (Sérgio Buarque, Caio Prado, Gilberto Freyre, Mário de Andrade, Mário Pedrosa, Antonio Candido, etc.). It was a confrontation that had been the object of frequent discussions throughout the course, dealing with the process of decolonisation and issues around the national *formation*.

A fact that added interest and emotional density to the process was that the university students had been victims of the same military shock troop that,

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7 A clandestine settlement in the hinterland where escaped slaves took shelter and created families. Many of them have survived as hidden villages and exist up to the present as '*quilombolas communities*' – which, according to the Constitution, should be protected, like the Indians – and have their ancestral and collective rights to the land legally recognised. More often than not, this remains a hollow promise.

8 In this specific case, the encampment we wanted to observe had been set up by the residents evicted from the Pinheirinho neighbourhood, in São José dos Campos, by means of bombs and armoured vehicles, used by the São Paulo military police raid, on 21–4 January 2012, to annihilate the neighbourhood. There, 3,000 families of workers had set up many years ago, and built homes for themselves, occupying the place without the landowner's permission.

after invading USP on 8 November [2011] and doing so again on the following Carnival Sunday, also evicted the 3,000 families that resided in the Pinheirinho neighbourhood.

The two visits were originally scheduled to take place on 11 April, using a school bus – at first available to support the didactic activities upon request of the departments. However, this plan had to be suspended the day before, because the head of the visual arts department, who had to sign the request to use the vehicle, refused to do so. In fact, when asked, the head of the visual arts department restricted the authorisation of the vehicle's use exclusively to research in the old Jesuit convent [sic]. Moreover, a department official (in fact, another art history teacher) refused to provide a letter attesting to the banning of visits to the homeless encampment – as if the unwritten university tradition of racial segregation and exclusion was enough to ground such an expedient, without reasoning, so deeply rooted is the social segregation in the history of USP.

In short, to the Jesuits, paradigms of knowledge and civilisation [sic], academic deference and studious attention. To illiterate workers with no residential address, and moreover, mostly non-white, nothing, not even a record of their existence.

Therefore, we may conclude: can any doubt remain that USP is still ruled by the atavistic, ignoble and unwritten statute of the latifundia-enslaving system? But why should it be written, after all, if it seems so natural in the present order? In other words, let me insist: the very order of the latifundia that still rules Brazil's main university today.

### **Workers and Students United against Genocide**

Nevertheless, the students and the teacher of the discipline found their way by paying for their own transport and by changing the itinerary. Thus, the group came to carry out the forbidden part of the scheduled research, weeks later, on a rainy 2 May of silvery light, by resorting to a combination of intercity bus lines. Students and teacher made direct contact with the encampment, which began to be erected on 2 March [2012]. Precariously set up, there were 2,500 families, totalling around 11,000 people, including many lap children, piled up in plastic-sheet huts, erected directly on the soil and mud, without any kind of thermal protection, sanitation or electricity. Most of them had been living in masonry houses shortly before, until they were brutally evicted, as mentioned earlier, by the state government troops at the service of a notorious stock market speculator, Mr. Naji Nahas, the landowner in question who multiplied

his shady fortune under the criminal auspices of the military protectorate. Yet another chapter of the Brazilian process of primitive accumulation and expropriation of the essential means of survival of the majority, treated like livestock.

### 8 December 2011

The visit – which, in the new circumstances, left the convent aside – was also the outcome of a previous invitation, attended on 8 December 2011 by a dozen students and a teacher of the movement ‘USP em Greve’ [‘USP on Strike’], in addition to two directors of the SINTUSP (USP workers’ union).

Thus, in a public event convened by the central union Conlutas (CSP) and a front of movements formed by the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST), the occupied factory Flaskô, the Landless Workers Movement (MST) of the region of Campinas, and by inhabitants of the Pinheirinho neighbourhood, all these united sectors paraded on Avenida Paulista, to eventually occupy the regional office of the Presidency of the Republic in São Paulo, in order to warn – but in vain! – the highest levels of the federal government (incidentally, in the hands of the so-called Workers’ Party (PT)) that the offices of the Regional Court and government of São Paulo were coming up with the macabre plot against the families of Pinheirinho. This plot was finally achieved and reached its peak with the aforementioned forced eviction operation in January 2012. It was a plot worthy of being included in the list of house evictions and mass relocations of the population by military forces, such as those of Palestinians or those in the Kosovo war, to mention only a few of the recent notorious cases in the international context.

### Against Militarisation and Cultural Genocide

Hence, last March (2012), on a Saturday night, Pinheirinho’s persecuted exiles occupied two tracts of vacant land in Embu and another on the outskirts of Santo André, both in the Greater São Paulo. Thus, when this action took place, a delegation of members of the ‘USP em Greve’ movement were with the families evicted from Pinheirinho, providing political solidarity to the new occupation act.

On 2 May, a new visit by a group from USP reiterated the symbolic testimony of common resistance to the militarisation of the social agenda and of the university conflicts.



In its brutality and blindness, oppression begins to again draw together the social sectors that the bitter history of a country – which is a paradigm of slavery in the world – had split and kept apart. At some point, these social sectors will join forces and once again build a common political front to defeat segregation and infamy.

Thus, who knows, despite a lot of evidence to the contrary, a new convergence or common movement, in the wake of those of the National Union of Students' Popular Culture Center (CPC-UNE) and of Hélio Oiticica's experiments, may be undergoing a new formation. Besides, one may also think that despite everything, through such movement, the university may be undergoing a kind of rebirth. However, this time not as a result of the exclusionary will of the oligarchs – as is the case with USP – but as a legitimate objective of common struggle: of acts of reciprocal solidarity against cultural genocide. Therefore, if so, such will be a new university: socially inclusive, broad, and democratic.

For now, memories, photographs, and other recollections of the visit, amidst mud and debris, document the resistance. But among the preserved trees in the occupied area, they also constitute signs of the popular courage and unrest of university students, banished by the prevailing tyranny at the USP, but who, however, through their struggle, can already be regarded as the founders of the democratic university of tomorrow.

[Contrary to the hopeful tone with which I concluded these 2012 notes, at this very moment, as I write this addendum (January 2017), revising the text to include it in a book, the rectory obtained (just like the landowner of Pinheirinho, in 2011–12) a judicial injunction to expel SINTUSP from its headquarters in the university campus – where it has been for 50 years! The union's headquarters is now under siege by the state military police, armed with machine guns, to ensure against the wrath of the workers, students, and teachers the construction, by an outsourced company, of a metal grid fence to block access – inside the campus! – to the union headquarters. As one of the workers said, watching the fence being erected under a circle of machine guns, 'now, we have a USP-Palestine!'

A historian must note that both the escalation of tyranny and the resilience of workers are reaching unforeseen levels. Thus, by late February, the workers had already collected almost 11,000 signatures from people in Brazil and abroad, in support of the permanence of SINTUSP in the campus.<sup>9</sup> Some weeks later, a court decision imposed on the Rectory the obligation to provide a new and decent headquarters to SINTUSP inside the campus.]

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9 See the campaign pamphlet at: [http://www.sintusp.org.br/2013/files/LabourStart\\_Brasil\\_-SINTUSP\\_site\\_english.pdf](http://www.sintusp.org.br/2013/files/LabourStart_Brasil_-SINTUSP_site_english.pdf).

## Art against the Grain

### Change of Ground

The critical restructuring of the Neo-Concrete idea of *participation*,<sup>1</sup> which conveyed strongly sensory aspects and implied the observer's bodily activity, reached a new level when Antonio Dias, already living abroad, distanced himself from the expressive or 'passional'<sup>2</sup> character of his work. Nevertheless, though colder, Dias's work did not lose its sharp violence. In fact, in a foreign country and having less immediate access to themes and materials of the general sensibility, the work reduced its *front* against Pop art, turning his edge and irony towards new targets.

Dias's work situation had in fact changed in many ways. However, before mapping out his new setting, let us consider the collective and dramatic background of his work situation. In Brazil, the political situation had become very serious. After mass protests against the dictatorship in 1968, the toughening of the regime resulted in successive arrests, removal of rights and widespread violence. Heads previously spared were cut off. There were forced exiles, mass expulsions of teachers and students from universities, widespread censorship of the media and spectacles, etc. As a consequence, a decisive part of Brazilian intellectual life – which was vivid, original, and intensely focused on opposition to the dictatorship between 1964 and 1968 –<sup>3</sup> moved abroad. Paris became one of the new centres. After receiving a grant to travel there at the end of 1967, Dias settled in Milan the following year.<sup>4</sup> A work as attentive to historical

1 For the discussion of the neo-concrete notion of *participation* and of its significant changes since the crisis of geometric abstraction, due to the civil-military coup in 1964, see Chapter 4 in this volume.

2 Mário Pedrosa emphasised and scrutinised the 'passional' tenor of the work of the young Dias at the time of the New Figuration in an insightful text for the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro, 29 November 1967), later republished in two collections of texts by the critic. See Pedrosa 1981f, pp. 219–20; Pedrosa 1998h, pp. 368–70; English translation: Pedrosa 2015h, pp. 321–2.

3 See Schwarz 1978. The text was originally published with the title 'Remarques sur la culture et la politique au Brésil, 1964–1969', in Schwarz 1970. English translation: Schwarz 1992, pp. 126–59.

4 Upon his return from London, after having participated in the events of May in Paris, Dias

circumstances as his would not go through such changes unchallenged. The regime of observer *participation* acquired new coordinates and became one of the aspects of Dias's work that signalled changes in perspective.<sup>5</sup>

### Painting-Rerouting

Settled in the European circuit, Dias's work targeted signs of the circuit of art exchanges and contemplative practices. Dias also took up new weapons, developing new poetic structures appropriated or '*detournées*' (rerouted, as the Situationist movement then in vogue in Paris used to say). Dias quickly hijacked practices or operational procedures from Minimalist and Conceptual art – predominant currents in the Anglo-Saxon art world at that time. Thus, Dias's works became pictorial structures, at first sight, with analytical purposes. In effect, the Minimalist and Conceptual movements were related to the analytical philosophy of language, very widespread at that time in North American universities. In the new key, Dias's paintings consisted of panels or large *tile*-paintings: that is, cold and distant pictorial surfaces, presented as if they were samples. In sum, such paintings were less sentimental and sensorial than those rerouted by Pop Art, previously used in New Figuration.

### Maps of Exile, Cells of the Self

A series of works from the period dealt with exile issues. They contained allusions to loss and unfamiliarity, but also included graphs, diagrams and samples, in front of which problems were discussed as if in a laboratory.

The new pictorial treatment, ostensibly cold and objectivist, was purged of all expressiveness. It displayed distance and irony before its own pain and in relation to painting – thus parodying the Conceptual device and Minimalist art. Only the title-caption denoted some emotion, albeit in a very synthetic and encrypted way. However, this emotion only became apparent at a second moment, provided by the montage and, effectively, for those who knew the

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was unable to renew his visa. He travelled to Venice in June, visiting a 34th Biennale taken over by manifestations by artists against the organisation. He then settled in Milan, where he established relations with the emerging *arte povera* group. See Pradilha 2015, p. 100.

5 For the detailed discussion of one of Dias's works that is illustrative of his evolution with regard to the idea of *participation*, see the last topic of Chapter 4 in this volume.

original context or the author's historical condition – of exile. In fact, the meaning erupted from the dialectical combination of opposites. That is, on the one hand, objectified and apparently anti-narrative painting, presented conceptually in the Minimalist mode, and on the other, a title-caption that, while reduced to a minimum, leaked the drama of exile in one drop through a corner or crevice.

At any rate, once aligned, the title-captions were evocative enough to suggest the notebook of an exile, that is, of someone in a state of strangeness and absorbed in an ongoing dialogue with himself. See, for example, the works: *Anywhere is my Land* (1968);<sup>6</sup> *AlphaOmega Biography* (1968);<sup>7</sup> *Black Mirror* (1968);<sup>8</sup> *Heads [Cabeças]*, 1968;<sup>9</sup> *Camouflage [Camuflagem]*, 1968; *Environment for the Prisoner* (1968);<sup>10</sup> *The Hard Life* (1968);<sup>11</sup> *History* (1968);<sup>12</sup> *Free Continent/ Cultural Development* (1968/1969);<sup>13</sup> *Trama* (1968/1977);<sup>14</sup> *Keep Dry my Eyes* (1969);<sup>15</sup> *The Space Between* (1969); *Environment for the Prisoner: The Day/ The*

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- 6 Please note: henceforth several of Dias's works, starting from 1968, have their original titles in English. This is one such case. See image in Dias 2009, p. 97, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#98](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#98). Moreover, please note that hereafter the page indication concerning the images always refers to the catalogue page number, and not to the electronic or pdf file number (unless indicated otherwise).
  - 7 See image in Dias 2009, p. 107, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#108](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#108).
  - 8 See image at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66222/black-mirror>.
  - 9 See image in Dias 2009, p. 113, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#114](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#114).
  - 10 See image in Dias 2009, p. 136, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#138](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#138).
  - 11 See image in Dias 2009, p. 108, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#110](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#110).
  - 12 See image in Dias 2009, p. 93, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#94](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#94).
  - 13 See image in Dias 2009, p. 114, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#116](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#116).
  - 14 See Dias 2015, pp. 96–7, for the project of *Trama*, written by Dias and Oiticica. For two innovative and detailed studies on *The Illustration of Art* and, in particular, the portfolio *Trama* and its tenor of transitional work – whose initial conception dates from 1968, but only came to be achieved in the 'Nepali papers' (1977) – see Motta 2008 and 2011 (in the latter, see especially pp. 158–81 and 220–88). See images of *Trama* (1968–77) in Dias 2009, pp. 144–5, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#146](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#146).
  - 15 See image in Dias 2009, p. 40, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#42](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#42).

*Night* (1970),<sup>16</sup> *The Hardest Way* (1970),<sup>17</sup> *The Night* (1970),<sup>18</sup> *The Occupied Country* (1970),<sup>19</sup> *The Place* (1970),<sup>20</sup> *Project for an Artistic Attitude* (1970),<sup>21</sup> *Project for 'The Body'* (1970),<sup>22</sup> etc.

Given these changes, to some observers it seemed that the language of Dias's works had consequently suffered a profound discontinuation or rupture.<sup>23</sup> But this was not the case, because the constants that effectively governed Dias's language retained their primacy even if under different features, namely the discursive hijacking or appropriation,<sup>24</sup> a keen awareness of the contradictions between centre and periphery, the sharp and mordant irony. In short, the awareness of *combined* and simultaneous war against the hegemonic positions in the international art circuit, and in the geopolitical order, had become more acute.

These new weapons later proved to be well developed and sharp, when in 1971 Dias began a new project-series of works to which he gave the general title *The Illustration of Art*, whose variants were developed until 1978.<sup>25</sup> This

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- 16 See image in Dias 2009, p. 115, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#116](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#116).
  - 17 See image in Dias 2009, p. 103, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#104](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#104).
  - 18 See image in Dias 2009, p. 39, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#40](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#40).
  - 19 See image in Dias 2009, p. 117, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#118](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#118).
  - 20 See image in Dias 2009, p. 98, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#100](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#100).
  - 21 See image in Dias 2009, p. 102, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#104](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#104).
  - 22 See image in Dias 2009, pp. 104–5, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#106](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#106).
  - 23 See image of Antonio Dias, *The Occupied Country* (1970), in Dias 2009, p. 117, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#118](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#118).
  - 24 See image of Antonio Dias, *Movement of the Wind* [*Movimento do Vento*, 1968], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66227/movimento-do-vento>. See also image of *The Unfinished Monument* [*O Monumento Inacabado*, 1969], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra12085/monumento-inacabado>. And also the image of *The Illusionist* (1974), at: [http://mamrio.org.br/wp/colecoes/colecao-gilberto-chateaubriand-mam-rio/antonio-dias\\_209-3/](http://mamrio.org.br/wp/colecoes/colecao-gilberto-chateaubriand-mam-rio/antonio-dias_209-3/).
  - 25 See, for example, images of Antonio Dias, *The Illustration of Art/ Art & Society/ Model* (1975), in Dias 2017, p. 28 (on the PDF file), at: <https://nararoesler.art/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>; also in Dias 2009, p. 46, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#48](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#48). See also image of *The Il-*

work also maintained the political constants and the combative disposition in respect to the disparities between periphery and centre.

### The Sphinx of *The Space Between*

Before examining this project-series, however, let us dwell on the transition towards the coordinates of the new mode of *participation* that gained prominence in exile. I propose to refer to this new mode as dialectical-reflexive. Set as a didactic device, it was meant to constitute the meaning of each work based on a combination of opposites. To this end, caption and image were put in opposition through montage.

The progressive mode of construction of such a device was made especially explicit, in my view, in a project-series of works called *The Space Between*. This was developed between 1969 and 1971 and comprised different studies, supports, and results. In such a process, the truth of the series, its mode of unification, resided neither in the object nor in its material.<sup>26</sup> It was actually a critical and reflexive project, with a somewhat riddle-like and experimental character, whose development comprised a comparative confrontation and interaction between different moments and elements.

The first work of the series dates from 1969. It implies and emphasises the space between two cubes, both of which suggest two dice (although instead of numbers they resemble stellar or cosmic landscapes).<sup>27</sup> The 9.5 by 9.5 cm vinyl surfaces of the two cubes were silk-screen printed: one of them, with a black background speckled with white dots, reads ‘The Beginning’; the second cube has a white background speckled with black dots and reads ‘The End’.

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*lustration of Art/ Dazibao/ The Shape of Power* (1973), in Dias 2009, pp. 122–3, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#124](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#124).

26 ‘In the work of Antonio Dias, the plastic result is a mere symptom’, critic Paulo Sérgio Duarte keenly noted. Later, he insisted: ‘the object is a mere pretext which will later be incorporated to the rhetoric of the work’. See Duarte 2004, pp. 28, 32. Duarte is the main researcher and commentator on Dias’s work. He has written several enlightening studies about different moments in Dias’s career. In fact, throughout his activity as a critic, he developed a true ‘comradeship-in-arms’ with Dias – with whom he established a relationship of collaborative work and friendship since they first met in Milan in 1971 when they were both in exile. See, among others, his latest work on Dias (Duarte 2015).

27 See image of a later version (1999), a larger-scale work in marble and black granite to which the 1969 original, in vinyl and silk-screen, served as a project or prototype: Antonio Dias, *The Space Between* (1969–99), in Dias 2017, p. 13 (PDF page number), at: <http://www.nararoesler.com.br/usr/library/documents/main/33/antoniodias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

The observers, who as subject-consumers and individuals tend to refer to themselves first of all, see 'The Beginning' and 'The End' as references to their own existence. Thus, such an observer immediately and spontaneously projects himself into the 'space-between' the two vinyl dice. There he begins to day-dream about himself, as is often the case in the civilisation of commodities. Beyond the self-figuration (old or new, it does not matter) of each observer, Dias's subtle sarcasm in relation to the observer's spontaneous participation serves as a lesson – in this case, in the ironic manner of Miguel de Cervantes.

That said, let us focus on a later moment of the project – two 'editions' or variants made in 1971 – in which the implied greatness, in order to occur in the experiences provoked in *The Space Between*, appears *limited* and *quantified*, and, as such, put in impersonal terms. In this sense, the didactic and laboratory aspects are accentuated. As a result, the sphinx, so to speak, of *The Space Between*, in addition to changing its size, gained objectivity. Let us see how this happened and note the reasons behind the 1971 procedures.

First, let us look at two sound recordings contained on both sides of a vinyl record, and entitled *Record: The Space Between* (1971).<sup>28</sup> Then we shall discuss another project from the same year, derived from the sound recordings and pertinent to the same series: a three-dimensional iron prototype also called *The Space Between* (1971).<sup>29</sup>

By means of its strict geometrical ordering (obtained through regular cuts in an iron plate), this object reproduces the structure of the rhythmic order adopted in the two recordings, on both sides of the vinyl record.

The structure of the relationship established between both sides of the record is dual and homologous: on one side, the recording contains the sound of the mechanical ticking of a clock lasting 20 minutes; the other side contains a recording of breathing sounds, also lasting 20 minutes. The work of side A, with the pace of a machine, is called *Theory of Counting*. Side B, presenting breathing sounds, with the coming and going of inspiration and expiration, is called *Theory of Density*.

28 See image of Antonio Dias, *Record: The Space Between* (1971) at: <http://www.mercedesviegas.com.br/adias8.htm>. See also Dias 1994b, p. 168, for image of the recording session.

29 An iron plate prototype was made but is now lost. Its photograph can be seen in Dias 1979a, p. 23. However, the thickness of the plate used in that attempt did not satisfy Dias. Years later, there was a preliminary invitation by architect Ruy Ohtake to produce the work on another scale. The work would thus be integrated with a set of sculptures that would flank one of the expressways running near a waterfront in São Paulo. However, the project for a public park between the river and the expressway was never realised.

Each object represents, in a specific way and through different modules or units of measurement, a certain value which is expressed either in ticking or breathing, or in *cuts and folds*, in the case of the three-dimensional iron object. In short, such measures are equivalent. The first two last exactly 20 minutes, according to the label of the LP. Analogously, in the case of the iron prototype, the 12 folds or teeth resulting from cut-and-fold operations on the plate were conceived so as to translate, in the iron plate, the same rhythmic structure of the recordings. Thus, the alternations between the tick and tock of the gears of the clock, as well as those between inspiration and expiration are translated into the folds, either up or down from the plate's surface. These alternations reproduce in three-dimensional terms the graphic scheme of the two recordings – printed in red on the album cover, on a photograph of the author, taken while he was recording his own breathing sounds in the studio. In abstract terms, all structures of *The Space Between* (1971) are invariably based on the alternation between a positive and a negative shape.

What is the equivalence relation between the three modes of representation: sound recording of ticking sounds, breathing, and, finally, the translation of both in the iron plate? What is the value that unifies them, it seems to ask us in the form of a riddle? Dias behind the mask of the series?

What is precisely crystallised in the 1971 variants of the project *The Space Between*, despite the disparate and impossible appearances, lies in what unifies its different moments and means, modes, and forms of organisation and production in a single process, under a single denomination. It cannot be anything other than the same abstract amount of human labour: the effort expended during 20 minutes, regardless of the specific or particular shape achieved by the result or material upon which energy was expended.

A use-value, or useful article ... has value only because abstract human labour is objectified [*vergegenständlicht*] or materialized in it. How ... is the magnitude of this value to be measured? By means of the quantity of the 'value-forming substance', the labour, contained in the article. This quantity is measured by its duration, and the labour-time is itself measured on the particular scale of hours, days, etc.<sup>30</sup>

In this way, all objects of the series *The Space Between* designate, in synthesis, the same value: the similar amount of abstract labour or value substance, measured by its duration or an equivalent amount of abstract labour expended

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30 See Marx 2006, pp. 18–19; English translation: Marx 1990, p. 129.



and materialised distinctly now by accompanying the functioning of the clock, now in the dynamics of the lung confronted and pervaded by the clock, now in the three-dimensional geometric object, obtained through the rhythmically regular interventions on the iron plate.

In effect, no one ignores that the quantity and quality of the effort in each case are different. That is, to passively listen to the ticking of a clock, to inspire and expire during 20 minutes, and to cut and fold an iron plate, involve qualitatively distinct efforts. However, all of them are equivalent to the same amount of abstract labour. In effect, the iron prototype is but an analogon or metallic three-dimensional equivalent to the recorded rhythm of the mechanic pulsation of the clock, and, analogously, of the living and metabolic labour of the to-and-fro of the lung, mediated by the rhythm of the clock.

However, what ensures the homology between all these forms, notwithstanding their different physical properties and distinct usages, in their eventual usefulness? Nothing less than human labour – whose measurement by duration is given either by the pace of the clock or by the pace of the lung, or by the geometric regularity of *cuts* and *folds*.

The value and its substance therefore lie beyond the object and its material, in each case. Thus, regardless of the physical properties of each object, the series as a whole presents ‘crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values – commodity values [*Warenwerte*]’,<sup>31</sup> which derive from the amount of labour necessary to its production, or, in Marx’s words,

The total labour-power of society, which is manifested in the values of the world of commodities, counts here as one homogeneous mass of human labour-power, although composed of innumerable individual units of labour-power.<sup>32</sup>

From the perspective provided by the series, *The Space Between* is not the product, but the truth of its production, the effort expended between one point and another, regarded as the transformation of a given input during a certain period of common time.<sup>33</sup> In short, *The Space Between* consists only in

31 See Marx 2006, p. 18; English translation: Marx 1990, p. 128.

32 See Marx 2006, p. 19; English translation: Marx 1990, p. 129.

33 According to Dias, ‘[t]he idea for the album came from waiting for my daughter to be born. In the room next door in which my wife was *in labour*, I could hear only two sounds in alternation: her breathing and the ticking of a clock. I imagined a way to depict the scene and that could only be done through a recording’ (emphasis added). *Apud* Alencar 1974, *apud* Pradilha 2015, p. 104.

the visible updating, under different forms, of *living labour*, the real energy or force of transformation that each one is potentially endowed with, before this real energy or force is predicated in a coactive manner, under various forms, according to the interest of those who took possession of it, by purchase or by any other means of imposition.

### In Order to Leave the Art-Cave

In this regard, Dias's answer to the question raised by the common denomination, *The Space Between*, uniting seemingly disparate things, goes far beyond the initial mirage awakened by an art object. In sum, bringing together the different episodes of the effort, under one and the same denomination, does not draw attention to the visible structure – as Concrete Art intended – but rather signals its substance, of which the structure is only a symptom, without visual nexus. 'It imposes reflection without contemplation', as Paulo Sérgio Duarte points out.<sup>34</sup>

In such terms, Dias does not limit himself to focusing on the individual subject, vaguely intuiting it – for example, through a characteristically authorial expressive gesture. But he takes a leap forward, positioning himself in the new concrete circumstances, in this case, inherent to an industrial and financial centre of late capitalism, where the artist settled: Milan.

Thus, Dias establishes the subject not in humanistic or subjectivist terms – as *ipseity* or 'density' – as ironically evoked by the title of the breathing exercise, *Theory of Density*. Instead, Dias designates it, in materialistic and concrete terms, as a source of living labour and a productive agent in the face of the injunctions of capital: a subject of the labour-power and origin of the value materialised in the object, marked by abstract time, under the rule of capital.

In short, in this work that no longer belongs to the New Figuration – but to Dias's new poetic cycle outlined in one of the major cities of late capitalism – the nonconformist disposition of exposing the nexuses of the social order remains. Along with it, knowledge is updated: knowledge of the incisive cut and of the surprising and aggressive montage, of the dialectical and mordant irony – very characteristic of Dias's works at the time of New Figuration. Such knowledges are now reinvigorated as inducers of reflection, in a context in which primitive accumulation, body trafficking and violence are no longer visible to the naked eye, but only in a dialectical way, that is, mediated through opposite figures.

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34 See Duarte 1979, p. 24; Duarte 2004, p. 32.

In this case, it is a matter of arming the gaze, sharpening its edges and reflection in order to go beyond appearances and to avoid becoming entangled in subterfuges or dissimulations. The strategy of anti-art, conceived by Oiticica in Rio de Janeiro before the harshening of the regime, corresponded to a staunch movement for a radical democratisation of art. Dialectical-reflexive *participation*, in turn, developed in exile, and the related series *The Illustration of Art*<sup>35</sup> correspond to an elusive or defensive move. They present themselves as an escape forward in order to confront the adversity of new situations brought about by the diaspora. *Dialectic-reflexive participation makes the truth appear elsewhere*, not in the art object.

### Negative Banners

Hence the dentate rectangles and the missing parts. They are warning signs against Minimalist formalism and others, with similar premises, which suppose the self-referral and self-sufficiency of the picture. In contrast to the prevailing formalism and the amorphous tenor of the artistic surplus available on the international art circuit, these signs of lack – negative banners – indicate aesthetic confrontations that became a constant in Dias's works during exile – but in a combative way. These banners function as *parangolés of lack*, against self-referential art, for the purpose of an ideological confrontation in the field of art, against formalisms, either clothed as Conceptual or Minimalist art.<sup>36</sup>

### Socratic Games

Thus, in the period from 1968 to 1971, which led to the series *The Illustration of Art* (1971–8), Dias set up a variety of dialectical or Socratic visual games which included sentences or isolated words, articulated with images with a seemingly opposed meaning.<sup>37</sup>

35 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *The Illustration of Art/ One & Three/ Stretchers* (1971), in Dias 2009, p. 43, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#45](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#45).

36 See image of Antonio Dias, *The Invented Country [O País Inventado/ Dias-de-Deus-Dará*, 1976], at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/153952>.

37 See images of Antonio Dias, *The Illustration of Art/ One & Three/ Stretchers* (1971); *The Illustration of Art* (1972, on glass) and *The Illustration of Art* (1972, on canvas); *The Illustration of Art/ Uncovering the Cover-up* (1973); and *The Illustration of Art/ Art & Society/ Model*

In summary, through irony, the result of the montage entailed an effect of *critical shock*. The relation of direct or first-person *participation*, conceived by Neo-Concrete art, suffered a *shock*. In new terms, the viewer's *participation* in Dias's work was only viable through reflection and criticism before the situation of contemplation. That is, it was didactically conditioned to the acceptance of a long-lasting process of conflict and tension. The result was the awareness of a contradiction installed in the core of the subject itself. Let us examine its terms.

### Contradiction or Malaise in the Welfare State

Along the lines of dialectical-reflexive *participation*, a mode of critical resistance or symbolic mini-guerrilla warfare was thus set up. In principle, this mode could rely upon a certain level of support and acceptance from a relatively enlightened part of public opinion. Thus, *Socratic participation* – so to speak – according to Dias's proposal, implied a faculty of active judgement, in the terms of the debate in the democratic context of the welfare state. At the opposite pole of this contradiction, inherent in the formation of subjectivity in the welfare state, there was a subjective pattern *related to consumption in general* and therefore prone to narcissistic gratifications and caprices. Briefly, subjective patterns turned toward the handling of hedonistic investments in commodities favouring self-recognition. This was often translated into the acquisition of the chosen commodity, last but not least, as art objects for one's own residence or workplace, properly personalised.

Against the grain of the flows of narcissistic restitution, the observer of Dias's works – *urged by the irony* to critically arm himself against self-recognition – was led by such a process to prepare for a game of opposites, that is, for a problem with no resolution. In this game – effectively more for the few than for the many – no immediate gratification, happy ending, or solution was offered – except on the condition of an act of *dialectical* consciousness, assimilating the antithesis or the relation of opposites as a fundamental and indispensable step for the reflexive outcome.

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(1975), in Dias 2017, pp. 25, 26, 27 and 28 (PDF page numbers), respectively, at: <http://www.nararoesler.com.br/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>. The works dated 1971 and 1975 ('... *One & Three/ Stretchers*' and '... *Art & Society/ Model*') include the following statement on the wall: 'All reduction and enlargement is a matter of accommodation'.

In a certain middle-income social stratum – which even today, despite the crisis, is relatively large in the central and semi-central economies of Western Europe (where Dias settled and began to work) relatively enlightened subjectivity and an active faculty of judgement existed on a public scale. Socratic games were therefore possible. That is, in the last two decades of the welfare state, a sufficiently large contingent of observers had formed on the bases described, reasonably well-informed and willing to visit museums and art exhibitions. The first ten years of Dias's exile coincided with such a widespread disposition of mind for judgement.

In these terms, throughout the series *The Illustration of Art* (1971–8) realised during the years of the welfare state – *et pour cause* – the paths of Dias's work moved away from the domestic-artisanal artistic economy and from the dimension of the immediacy of *expressionist* materials.<sup>38</sup>

### Expressionism and Globalisation

Nevertheless, since the early 1980s, something of the expressionist language returned to Dias's agenda. In order to understand this resumption, it must be remembered that it occurred after Thatcher's rise to power in May 1979. Moreover, the resumption was developed in the era of so-called 'Reaganomics', that is, contemporaneously with a new global 'blitzkrieg' for expanding capitalism, grounded in the crucial political conquests in the UK and in the USA – and now in an offensive move to systemically unify and reorder the global economic-financial space. For Dias, what was the meaning of reappropriating expressionism in the era of so-called globalisation?

### Antithetical Painting

If, as we have already concluded, the negations in Dias's works, in the mode of critical appropriation, play a more decisive role than the affirmations, it will be better to rephrase the question as follows: what kind of antithesis was instituted at the crossroads between the terms of late capitalism – in the

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38 In varying ways, both ingredients (artisanal artistry and expressionist signs) – linked to the authorial *self* or to the spectator's self and, in this quality, very present in the daily lives of a peripheral society – had played an important role in the public debate raised by the New Figuration. But this was no longer the case. For more on these issues, see Chapter 4 in this volume.

mode of transition shock (in the way Naomi Klein uses the term) –<sup>39</sup> and the reappropriation of *expressionist* materials by the mature artist, conscious and master of his own means? What can be extracted from such a manoeuvre and from the clash plotted<sup>40</sup> by Dias?

### Scenes from a *Tsunami*: Environment for an Artistic Perspective

As we know today, everything has changed. Thatcher's rise in 1979 was just the tip of the iceberg. In-depth, it was a tectonic movement of capitalism, rearranging its mode of accumulation through all kinds of attacks against workers and social rights, as first happened in Chile. Such movement had been taking shape in the previous decade, in many countries since the battles of 1968. Later, this has taken on the scale and crushing impact of a tsunami of big businesses against the fragile and ephemeral wage agreements that once characterised the welfare state. Behind the scenes, an economic crisis put an end to the so-called 'Thirty Glorious Years'<sup>41</sup> of economic expansion in the postwar period. There are those who say that the recession in question has been largely induced,<sup>42</sup> in order to lower wages and recompose profit rates, but it is not possible to enter into this discussion here.

In any case, in order to better deal with such issues, it is necessary to develop a synthetic point of view by means of an overview of the global historical process. In effect, without such a synthesis it is impossible to follow a discourse such as that of Dias's poetics, always organically associated with an up-to-date assessment of the relations between periphery and centre and permeated by a systemic historical perspective – both inherent in the peripheral critical experience and in its sharpening stemming from the exile-form. Dias's work, in fact, is not for beautiful souls, nor is it for Heideggerianisms or transcendentalisms of any kind. In fact, it really demands that the viewer heed Hegel's advice to read newspapers every day.

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39 Klein 2007.

40 See image of Antonio Dias, *Two Towers* [*Duas Torres*, 2002], in Dias 2014, p. 31, ill. 14, p. 17 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).

41 For the apologetic book from which financial journalism borrowed and disseminated this denomination, see Fourastié 1979. For a critical and in-depth examination of the cycle of economic expansion (1947–72), see Mandel 1985 and 1978.

42 See Frank 1977c.

In sum, the question is of historical and strategic order and concerns the end of the project-series *The Illustration of Art* (1971–8). In short, how did Dias's work plan to face the *diktat* of the '*pensée unique*' or of the 'end of history' when he decided to end the project-series *The Illustration of Art*? We know that it was transformed, incorporating a panoply of expressive signs and procedures, decidedly and ostensibly different from those of *The Illustration of Art*. For what reasons and with what tricks did Dias's work embark on the new crossing or migration of discursive fields?

### Archaeology of Production

Before the constitution of a new programme, there was, however, an important intermediate or transition stage, equivalent to an ethical-reflective retreat in which Dias researched and meditated on a new 'economy model', as some of his works mention in the captions or titles of the series *The Illustration of Art*.<sup>43</sup> This process began with the series of 'Nepali papers', produced from 1977 onwards by the artist himself with help from local craftsmen during a five-month stay in the Himalayas.

This passage consisted of an immersion in a primitive mode of production in which Dias sought to experiment with pre-capitalist procedures that preceded the specialisation and alienation inherent in the mode of production according to a distinction between manual and intellectual labour.<sup>44</sup> Thus Dias re-elaborated and experienced a point of view antithetical to that of production under the given conditions of late capitalism. Such a perspective mediated and processed, in the artist's mode of work, the transition from *The Illustration of Art* to the following cycle. Subsequently, as we shall see, it also enabled the establishment of an antithetical reflexive perspective concretely distanced in terms of its work mode in relation to contemporary painting and to the global trend of ambiguous revivalism of expressionist modes.

43 See, for example, image of *The Illustration of Art/ Economy/ Model* (1975), in Dias 2009, pp. 120–1, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#122](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#122).

44 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *The Illustration of Art (Me and Others)*, 1977; and *The Illustration of Art/ Tool & Work* (1977), in Dias 2017, p. 36 and p. 37 (PDF page number), respectively, at: <https://nararoesler.art/usr/library/documents/main/33/antoniodias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

### Aesthetic Exposure of the Uneven and Combined Mode

Thus, once reinstalled in the circuits of production and circulation, upon his return from Nepal and from a didactic-experimental residency in a university centre for contemporary art in his native region in Paraíba (in the Northeast Region of Brazil, an equivalent of the Italian *Mezzogiorno*), Dias synthesised such experiences in a new set of works.

In them, a new moment of transition took place through the combination of industrial materials (iron oxide, graphite, metallic pigments, etc.) and Nepali paper. This resulted in works that evoked or carried with them something of 'still lifes', but this was not quite the case. In reality, those were acts of dissection, in settings that had nothing in common with an artist's bucolic studio or refuge. They suggested, rather, tables for autopsies or a laboratory of legal medicine.

In fact, in the case of Cubist paintings and collages, the elements incorporated or alluded to were referred to the artist-craftman's studio (papers, charcoals, sketches, etc.) and to bohemian life (bottles, glasses, cigarettes, matches, guitars, etc.). In contrast, in the case of Dias's dissections of dead species, instead of elements symbolising a studio, of fruits and other elements of the still life genre, there entered indicators of dead labour and of a manufacturing regime for surplus extraction: bones and dollar signs, a gallery floor plan and serpents, spatial boundaries and flags – in short, signs of property, among working tools, hammers, nails, axes, ovens, etc.<sup>45</sup>

More than that, the combination of Nepali paper and industrial materials implied and articulated artisanal and industrial modes and materials, typical of the regime – according to André Gunder Frank – of 'development in under-development',<sup>46</sup> without forgetting the aforementioned *uneven and combined* mode, typical of peripheral economies.

In summary, based on his two experiences of work in the periphery – in Nepal and upon his return to Brazil (in Paraíba and Rio de Janeiro) – Dias forged his transition to a new critical and productive perspective. Accordingly, he also counted for this on his renewed specific experience of peripheral productive processes of accelerated development, that usually articulate artisanal and industrial elements in *uneven and combined* terms.

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45 See images of Antonio Dias, *Untitled* (1983), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra12075/sem-titulo>; *Water and Salt/ Everyday* (1983), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra12071/agua-e-sal-quotidiano-diptico>; and *Hissing* (1983), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra12069/hissing>.

46 See Frank 1967, pp. 159–73.



In short, such experiences, encompassing specific diversities, provided the necessary and sufficient conditions for Dias's work to critically take, in a new cycle, neo-expressionism as *farce*. The weapon used by Dias as a response to the new conjuncture of both capitalism and the arts consisted in parodying neo-expressionist painting, by Baselitz, Kiefer, Schnabel, etc., as he had once done with Pop art, Conceptual art and Minimal art. These are the elements of a strategy that we will examine in more detail later, but after an *intermezzo* in order to outline, schematically, the steps of Dias's strategy and its insertion into a larger historical framework.

### Notes on a Cultural Genocide Foretold/ A Scheme, Some Questions and Possible Answers

1. Between the social tragedy promoted by the new capitalist cycle and the arts turned into farce, what was the new role for the artist?

At that point, Dias's dilemma – which was certainly not individual, but one of a critical and collective project he shared with Oiticica and others – can be found in a remark made by Oiticica after his return from New York, where he had resided since November 1970. Oiticica declared in November 1978 to the journalist Jary Cardoso of *A Folha de São Paulo*: 'You know what I found out? That there is a genocide programme underway, because most people I knew in Mangueira are either in prison or have been killed'.<sup>47</sup>

A few months later, Oiticica sketched out the project *Parangolé Area: the Round of Death* [*Parangolé Área: a Ronda da Morte*]. Dated 20 May 1979, the note was handwritten on the front and back of a sheet of paper.<sup>48</sup> It included the sketch of a 'closed area/ a black circus/ shiny: through/ the black / stroboscopic lights/ from the inside/ in a permanent round'. A little further down, below the sketch, there is a note: 'inside people dance to disco music'. On the back of the page, another handwritten note: 'this vision occurred me today *dimanche* and I dedicate it to *all* my dead friends-lovers (I think of ...)/ is this

47 See Oiticica 2009a (originally published in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, 5 November 1978).

48 See images of the project for *Parangolé Area: the Round of Death* [*Parangolé-Área: a Ronda da Morte*, 1979] in Oiticica 1979, at: [http://54.232.114.233/extranet/enciclopedia/ho/detalhe/docs/dsp\\_imagem.cfm?name=anexo/0085.79%20normal%20p01.gif](http://54.232.114.233/extranet/enciclopedia/ho/detalhe/docs/dsp_imagem.cfm?name=anexo/0085.79%20normal%20p01.gif) and [http://54.232.114.233/extranet/enciclopedia/ho/detalhe/docs/dsp\\_imagem.cfm?name=anexo/0085.79%20normal%20p02%20-%20632.gif](http://54.232.114.233/extranet/enciclopedia/ho/detalhe/docs/dsp_imagem.cfm?name=anexo/0085.79%20normal%20p02%20-%20632.gif).

work a MEDITATION ON DEATH AND DANCE/ THE ROUND/ SIMULTANEITY/ TIME-DANCE/ DEATH LINKED/ TO THIS TIME – DANCE AS PART OF IT'.<sup>49</sup>

Beyond the dramatic perception of a genocide under way, Oiticica's sketch for a project observed a striking historical turning point before which the tragic note should be combined with a new normality, governed by intense and frantic circulation. This corresponded, in his sketch, to the imagined situation of people dancing inside a black circus tent, to 'disco music'. In Oiticica's intuition – still in sketch form, but fulminating – perception of the tragedy is combined with a frenzy and a hint of indifference toward someone else's fate and toward the farce.

The *Parangolé Área: a Ronda da Morte* was never realised. Oiticica died less than a year later, on 22 March 1980, seven days after having suffered a stroke in his apartment at the age of 42. Dias, in turn, at 36, no longer had the key interlocutor and co-worker with whom he had outlined a *Project-book – 10 plans for open projects* on a typed page in 1969 in London, which even today is a very impressive, moving, and unique document in Brazilian history, about the working partnership between the two artists.<sup>50</sup>

Either way, the fact is that in parallel and more or less concomitantly with Oiticica's remarks and notes, Dias, who had returned from Nepal, had pulled the emergency brake on his work, as the expression goes. In this way, he signalled the urgency of a new turning point in methods and tactical objectives, by publishing in 1979 a catalogue accompanying an exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Art at the Federal University of Paraíba (Núcleo de Arte Contemporânea (NAC-UFPb)). The catalogue was about 50 pages long and comprised a sort of annotated revisiting of his own work and bore a declaratory title: *Politics: He No Longer Finds the Spectators of His Own Amusements Amusing* [*Política: Ele Não Acha Mais Graça no Público das Próprias Graças*].<sup>51</sup>

2. What took place in the crisis so intuited and presented, after all? The artistic *diktat* of the time was that of a return to painting, exemplified by German Neo-Expressionism, the Italian Transavanguardia, and American Bad Painting. Like

49 *Underlined* and upper-case passages indicate Oiticica's own emphases. Also, the words 'shiny' and 'dimanche', not in Portuguese, were written in the original like this. See Oiticica 1979, *apud* Motta 2011, pp. 293–4.

50 The typewritten document, with 'original notes by Hélio Oiticica and Antonio Dias', is reproduced in a perfectly legible way, allowing the reader to note that it corresponds to a work strategy effectively adopted by Dias in that period. See Dias and Oiticica 2015, pp. 96–7. For details about the collaborative project, see Motta 2011, pp. 169–81.

51 See Dias 1979b, *apud* Motta 2011, pp. 296–309.

ten years earlier, at the beginning of exile, the force of things led to a new discursive *migration*. Dias prepared himself for this new leap forward, as we saw above, experiencing pre-capitalist and uneven and combined peripheral productive modes, through his residencies in the periphery (Nepal and Paraíba, in Brazil).

At the same time, we know that, on a global scale, a great offensive was unleashed by the Empire of Capital against the fragile and contradictory bases of the welfare state, progressively dismantled, country after country, in Western Europe.<sup>52</sup>

3. Let us remember that the mode of *participation* or active reception implied in the series *The Illustration of Art* presupposed and attributed to the viewer a certain malaise in late capitalism, translated into a critical disposition, reflexive commitment, and a desire for enlightenment.

However, the winds changed, ushering in the shock transition or *tsunami* towards capitalism without mercy. Following the British example, where the new great master of contemporary art, Charles Saatchi, operated as a sort of Goebbels to Thatcher, the art circuit started to play by the rules of finance and especially of new fortunes.<sup>53</sup> No longer were there reasons for the attribution of negativity or an active critical principle to the arts, or a potential for enlightenment linked to the aesthetic experience, in the new situation widely and variously mediated by money. It became a fact accessible to the merest observation that the inclination to narcissism in the aesthetic exercise, as in other spheres, had once again come to the fore, as during the time of the palaces of the *ancien régime* and courtly art. Let us briefly examine the process of ascension of the absolutism of capital in the course of which the empire of luxury over the arts was restored.

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52 Contrary to the Thatcher-Reagan axis, it is a fact that France markedly increased social benefits from 1981 onwards, soon after the electoral triumph of Socialist Party President François Mitterrand. Thus, in 1982, the government of prime minister Pierre Mauroy (1981–4) further increased salaries, vacations, pensions, aid, indemnities, and other social benefits, as well as state expenditures. In 1983, however, faced with inflation, unemployment, and external pressures, he had to surrender to austerity measures. In Bonn, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) had been in power since October 1982, with Helmut Kohl, and this increased pressure against Mauroy's distributive strategy and his Keynesian line. In 1984, Mauroy was dismissed and the government's alliance with the French Communist Party (PCF) was dissolved. Laurent Fabius, who succeeded Mauroy, adopted the austerity and pro-market perspective.

53 See Wu 2002.

But let us also make the synthesis from another angle and in other words, in order to better discern the complexity of the new contradictions. The battles of 1968 signalled in several parts of the world serious defeats of the workers' and student movements. Meanwhile, conservative think tanks affirmed, even before the general conflagration of 1968, that the tenor of democratisation installed in the central economies was incompatible with capitalism. Economists who were active critics at the time, like Gunder Frank,<sup>54</sup> or later investigations such as those by Naomi Klein, in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), brought a lot of data and non-disclosed information about the socially nefarious or even genocidal strategies and measures taken by the circles of power and high finance. As a result, neo-conservative and anti-democratic strategies were triggered in all central economies and added to new and varied devices of recolonisation, already implemented after the victories of the independence movements of Indochina (1954), Cuba (1959), Algeria (1962), and Nicaragua (1979). The systemic capitalist strategy was globally articulated. In some countries it was militarily implemented, while in others, like Spain, it was installed through apparently institutional and democratic means. Klein's research reveals the explicit manoeuvres of a plot on a systemic scale, in which the *coups d'état* in Brazil in 1964, in Indonesia the following year, and in Chile in 1973 were crucial experiments for the assault to be carried out against Western European welfare state institutions.

### The Passing Winds

Today, while we may not know of the obscure mechanisms and detours, we are aware of the consolidated triumph of this assault against public funds for social ends, leading to the increasing privatisation of those areas that Michel Foucault called 'biopolitics'. Nevertheless, for the purposes of synthesis, let us examine once again the times of *The Illustration of Art* – when art practitioners and viewers routinely assumed that the aesthetic experience had a potential for public *enlightenment*, in the tradition of aesthetic purposes constituted during the French Revolution.

In those years, those defeated in 1968 were not immediately wiped out. Thus, in the following years, one could still observe clashes and power disputes. In many countries, the established powers seemed on the verge of changing hands (Chile, Portugal and its former African colonies, Italy, Nicaragua, etc.).

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54 See, for example, Frank 1977a, pp. 34–65, see also Frank 1977b, pp. 9–23.

More than that, however, it was in the context of the very social relations that the forms of established power seemed to be at risk. People in their 60s, 70s and 80s today have witnessed such general questioning extended to daily life, either openly or in a more restricted way, in countries ruled by dictatorships. In spite of the latter, there were ideas 'blowing in the wind'. And the winds were relatively flowing and free when compared to the mirrored or glazed walls that now shape exchanges for primarily narcissistic purposes, in today's intersubjective practices.

### Pensée Unique

The winds have ceased to blow. A decisive turn has taken place. Along with a gospel of finance and the bible of the so-called '*pensée unique*', references to money have become the new lingua franca. People currently speak of anything in terms of 'costs and benefits'.

### About Gold, Perfumes and Poisons

In its terms and modes, Dias's work also marked the earthquake which radically changed the symbolic field. The notion of dialectical-reflexive *participation*, previously related to a malaise in capitalism and to a process of ongoing debate, as we saw, has given rise to another scale of contradictions and to other practices of irony, detachment, and conflict. This will be our focus from now on.

In the new age of money – which is the era of monetisation as the univocal gradient of social relations –<sup>55</sup> one can find, among other elements of Dias's work, allusions to gold,<sup>56</sup> perfumes, and poisons, symbols that induce *contra-perceptive* or transversal practices. In short, they signalled the construction of a new critical strategy, to look beyond the visible. In new terms, such a strategy was intended to erode the illusion inherent in images – indeed, as ephemeral as the new winners in the games of the market, who one day join the board of directors of Wall Street agencies, and the next can be seen behind bars.

55 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Energy Field* [*Campo de Energia*, 1991], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra21338/campo-de-energia>.

56 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Cranks* [*Manivelas*, 1999], in Dias 2017, p. 45 (PDF page number), at: <https://nararoesler.art/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

### Against the Farce: Parody

Predictably, Dias's strategy was unleashed, as we have seen before, from a critical appropriation, that is, in a negative mode. This time, the targeted and captured object to be parodied was Neo-Expressionism. As with Pop art, Minimalist art, and Conceptual art, the clichés characteristic of Neo-Expressionist painting underwent a twist, a process of *de-familiarisation* or ironic mimesis that emptied them of their current content.<sup>57</sup>

### Colonisation of the Self

Dias's operation responded to a set of interrelated factors. In the art world and in its circuits, now lubricated by online financial flows, there was a revival of painting and, in particular, of Neo-Expressionism, nourished by astronomical prices. In the redesigned geography of those rivers of money, it was a period of extreme monetarism, in which the heralds of Wall Street and of the City moved into an open attack against unions,<sup>58</sup> as well as extinguishing organisations of the welfare state in the central economies, or re-implanting them in new terms through corporations.

In the realm of experience and subjectivity, financialisation infiltrated multiple aspects of social life and then something like a *colonisation of the self* took place.<sup>59</sup> It was the golden age of the yuppies and of programmes aimed, first in Thatcher's London and then in many parts of the world, at turning workers into investors. Workers were disconnected from social security and, as investors, they were forced to seek assistance from pension funds, in the name of safeguarding what remained of retirement.

57 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Tango* (1985), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra5814/tango>.

58 See, for example, images of Antonio Dias, *Battlefield* [*Campo de Luta*, 1983]; *Two Factories/ Crossed Arms* (1984); and *Factories of Destruction* [*Fábricas de Destruição*, 1986], in Dias 1994b, pp. 91, 97 and 96, respectively.

59 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *Independent Heart* (1989), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66238/independent-heart>. See also image of *Sun Photo as Self-Portrait* (1991), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66231/sun-photo-as-self-portrait>, also in Dias 2017, p. 42 (PDF page number), at: <http://www.nararoessler.com.br/usr/library/documents/main/33/antioniodias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

## Counterexpressionism

In short, the situation put Neo-Expressionism and the rise of fictitious capital side by side. What did they have to do with one another? In response to such a state of affairs, Dias – a man of many knives, not only on his belt, but also in his teeth and eyes – appropriated Neo-Expressionist clichés and combined them with other materials: elements from Byzantine painting, residues of several materials, industrial pigments, solvents, oxides, and some emblematic signs: gallery plants, dollar signs, bones, tools, flags, etc.<sup>60</sup>

How was all that arranged, and to what end? Let us review the recurring procedures and elements, and identify some general characteristics of the works concomitant to the cycle of the hegemony of fictitious capital or financialisation in the West.

## Laboratory Expressionism

Dias uses residues of materials and not colours to enhance the opacity of the supports.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the surfaces of the works begin to undergo the impact of the application of chemical solutions, pigments and various residues. The canvasses are prepared by washing the paint-covered surfaces or by removing previously added elements by scraping or some other process. What remain are residues and impregnations.<sup>62</sup> This is a laboratory mode of expressionism, with an apparently organic texture, but meticulous and orderly in the production of a pictorial surface or ‘skin’.<sup>63</sup>

60 See, for example, images of Antonio Dias, *The Serpent* [*A Serpente*, c. 1982], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra62495/a-serpente>; and *How to Break the Bottle 1* [*Como Quebrar a Garrafa 1*, 1987], at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra12083/como-quebrar-a-garrafa-i>.

61 See, for instance, images of Antonio Dias, *The Electrician* (1986), in Dias 2009, p. 125, at: [https://www.daros-latinoamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#126](https://www.daros-latinoamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#126); and *The Man Who Walks* [*O Homem que Anda*, 1987], in Dias 2017, p. 41 (PDF page number), at: <https://nararoesler.art/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

62 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Boundaries* (1988), in Dias 2017, p. 44 (PDF page number), at: <https://nararoesler.art/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

63 See images of Antonio Dias, *Untitled* (undated, c. 1980s, watercolour), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra35120/sem-titulo>; and *Untitled* (1988, 55 × 75 cm), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra5812/sem-titulo>.

### Scenes of a 'Passive Revolution'?<sup>64</sup>

Large surfaces, in which accidents and textural irregularities make up particles of a system, frequently emerge impregnated with the silvery grey powder of graphite, one of the recurrent 'colours' in Dias's works from that period.<sup>65</sup> The works seem to evoke a unification of sensoriality on a larger scale. As these are the general features of the weapons (daggers, rifles, aeroplanes) and also the dominant colour of the automobiles manufactured at the time, one can clearly see where this general reform of perception comes from and where it goes. One can speak of 'armies of consumers' and of a certain militarisation of consumption, as the ostensive use of brands and group symbols or logos is disseminated and creates new uniforms.<sup>66</sup> So-called 'brand loyalty' has a similar meaning.

### Theatre of Operations

In Dias's early works, in the terms of the New Figuration, the signs and effigies of body parts resembled expressionism and the most painful thing at the time – people crushed by the 1964 coup.<sup>67</sup> In Dias's works conceived in the era of artistic Neo-Expressionist hegemony, however, silhouettes of tools, bones, and dollar signs – in short, disembodied symbols of living labour, immediate symbols of dead labour, of value and death – all evoke the little that remains of life devoured by the predatory advance of finances. Thus, a theatre of operations is delimited.<sup>68</sup>

64 See Thomas 2006, pp. 61–78.

65 See image of Antonio Dias, *Air Destroying Gorgeous Monuments* (1990), in Dias 2017, p. 42 (PDF page number), at: <https://nararoesler.art/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

66 See image of Antonio Dias, *Untitled* (1988, 200 × 200 cm), in Dias 2017, p. 46 (PDF page number), at: <https://nararoesler.art/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

67 See images of Antonio Dias, *The Smile* [*O Sorriso*, 1964], in Dias 2009, p. 132, at: [https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias\\_exhcat/#134](https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/ebooks/AntonioDias_exhcat/#134); and *Prisoner's Smoke* (*Fumaça do Prisioneiro*, 1964), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra5790/fumaca-do-prisioneiro>.

68 See image of Antonio Dias, *Untitled* (undated, c. 1980s, 33 × 33 cm), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra37796/sem-titulo>.



### Haloed and Money, Perfumes and Values

In addition to large surfaces – whose extension suggests limitlessness, exorbitant profits, lunar deserts, aerodrome-countries, and the signs-traces of struggles and ended lives – the paintings also include other elements that attract attention and function as decoys.<sup>69</sup> These elements are constructs in gold, copper or other shiny metals, in oval, circular or golden circuit shapes. They are, in fact, icons<sup>70</sup> whose application on the works' surface resembles the aspect of Dias's painting, which Mário Pedrosa had compared, in 1967, to the 'liturgical art of the Byzantine masters'.<sup>71</sup> But this is a liturgy of irony, which never ceases to celebrate the transformation of death into gold.<sup>72</sup> In addition to the family of icons, consisting of doubles of halos and money, there is another: that of perfume bottles and containers (referred to in the titles of the works).<sup>73</sup>

Perfumes seduce and give rise to daydreams. The reference to essential oils, which is certainly ironic in view of the notorious two-dimensionality of painting, is not superfluous and devoid of strategy.<sup>74</sup> Perfume bottles serve here as symbols or elements carrying the fetish or aura of commodity-money. Allusions to poison containers and to death complete such a panoply of an epoch, amid such accessories, which prefigured in refinement the Prada shoes worn by the Pope.<sup>75</sup>

69 See image of Antonio Dias, *Untitled* (1988, 200×200 cm), in Dias 2017, p. 46 (PDF page number), at: <https://nararoesler.art/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.

70 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *Sun Photo as Self-Portrait* (1991), in Dias 2017, p. 42, at: <http://www.nararoesler.com.br/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>; and also idem, *Independent Heart* (1989), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66238/independent-heart>.

71 Pedrosa 1981f, p. 221; Pedrosa 1998h, p. 371; English translation: Pedrosa 2015h, p. 323.

72 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *Geography for Children* (1999), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66234/geography-for-children>.

73 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *Two Similar Containers* (1989), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66233/two-similar-containers>.

74 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Parfum & Poison* (1989) in Dias 1994b, p. 143.

75 See images of *Little Bricks* (*Tijolinhos*, 1990), in Dias 1994b, p. 143; and *Container for Poison* (1993), in idem, p. 154.

## New Religiosity

Brilliant shapes and silhouettes of small bottles – evocations of seduction and death – are figures or *topoi* of the mythology typical of the end of the Cold War or of the assertion of the global supremacy of market forces.

With his return to painting and through the rehabilitation of the pictorial procedures that evoke Byzantine art, Dias discusses the new universal religion of volatile values, such as perfumes and the shine of dollar signs.<sup>76</sup> In the new imaginary Constantinople which Dias explores and analyses with the x-ray of his canvasses, one wall fell while another rose: that of Wall Street.

In the colour fields in which such icons and figures of value settle, they reign isolated as logos or trademarks. Around them, a myriad of micro-phenomena are disseminated, usually on a single chromatic substratum: small spots that stand out from the texture (impasto, grainy textures, etc.), grooves left by brushstrokes, traces of figures that are no longer there – signs of absence, since it is unnecessary to insist that the time of concentrated and vertiginous accumulation is also the time of invention and promotion of luxury and lack.

## Container-Self

This is an organic economy rich in singularities, which through various 'pictorial currencies' – brushstrokes, impasto, and similar elements – evokes the way of being of subjectivities.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, all this ironically refers to Neo-Expressionism and to its supposed subject of choice: contemporary subjectivity.

What subjectivity is this? A careful look at the question and at the accumulated history of Dias's work will have sufficient evidence to conclude: the *self which expresses itself*, in the set of symbols arranged by Dias, is the *self which calculates*. A container-self, so to speak. Like the legendary King Midas, from Phrygia, this container-self turns all it sees into its double, into another container or self, one that calculates.

Thus, Neo-Expressionism emerges as the expressionism of investors. In the twisting-hijacking that Dias applies to it, Neo-Expressionism speaks of economy, investments, symbolic exchanges.<sup>78</sup> Its discourse resembles that

76 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Bricks* (1991), in Dias 1994b, p. 145.

77 See image of Antonio Dias, *Two Things, United by the Gaze* [*Duas Coisas, Unidas pelo Olhar*, 1993], in Dias 1994b, p. 155.

78 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *Brazilian Painting/ Bosnian Jungle* (1994), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66239/brazilian-painting-bosnian-jungle>.

of the new managers, of corporate specialists, of journalists specialised in finance and investments.<sup>79</sup>

### Dead Labour

The strategic operation of the painter who dissects, simulates, and parodies Neo-Expressionism is as severe as a freezing.<sup>80</sup> In such operation, the elements of such style have long since lost all carnal and subjective real meaning, to appear as mere phantasmagoria, illusory images of a lost regime of subjectivity.<sup>81</sup> They have become gelid signs of empty subjectivities that only begin to circulate again as dead and mechanical labour.

### Fictitious Pleasure

These signs represent the facies of the automatic subjectivity of capital, exclusively self-referenced. A narcissistic subjectivity which calculates bids, benefits and costs, simulates risks, referring exclusively to itself – without supposing any whole greater than its actuarial balance sheets and accounting bulletins.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the elements of Neo-Expressionism, reinterpreted and re-enacted by Dias's irony, do not go beyond themselves and, as reflexes of irreflection, show signs of experiencing their own emptiness.<sup>83</sup> Thus, if it is true – as Dias's montages suggest – that the pathos of the historical subject of Expressionism and real suffering gave way, in Neo-Expressionism, to the narcissistic prism of the investor's self and to his specific wounds or needs, the style in question has some element of hysteria.<sup>84</sup>

Like a displaced and represented pleasure, this is the re-enactment of a manifestation of subjectivity that did not occur, because what appeared in its place was the dead and 'automatic' substance of capital.<sup>85</sup>

79 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *Man Flying* (1991), in Dias 1994b, p. 142.

80 See, for example, image of Antonio Dias, *Caramuru* (1992), in Dias 1994b, pp. 156–7.

81 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Ich* (1989), in Dias 1994b, p. 140.

82 See, for instance, image of Antonio Dias, *Room for Sorrow* (1989), in Dias 1994b, p. 141.

83 For a comparison between the irony of Dias's painting, which 'separates emotion from visibility', and Neo-Expressionist painting, which 'merges the image into the simulacrum of a scene' (of the pictorial act), see Duarte 1994, p. 28 (including English and German translations).

84 See, for instance, image of *Body (Corpo)*, 1989 in Dias 1994b, p. 132.

85 See, for instance, image of *Dots / Skin* (1994), in Dias 1994b, p. 158.

## The Work of Reception

In order to judge the extent, range, and science of Dias's gaze, it must be remembered that the creation of such situations or contexts of signification does not suppose a theology of the sign or a pious and uncritical semantic act. Awareness of the terrain in which combat is fought, that of the symbolic territory and the economy of art, constitutes the primary object of Dias's actions, since he went into exile. The endogenous conflicts of art practice constitute in his work a mediation for all conflicts, and they function as an unavoidable path towards other conflicts evoked by his art.

In this regard, none of his works presents a homogeneous surface or technique. Therefore, reception is urged to take place in leaps, striving to dialectically conquer different points of view or different levels of reflection.<sup>86</sup>

Rooted in the historical dimension – either viewed as general history or as history of art – Antonio Dias's works interrelate domains that were estranged and separated from one another by the social division of labour and the general reification of cognition.<sup>87</sup>

In the combination between the immanent experience of the gaze and reflection, the observer is led to reconstruct parts of a historical process much larger than the works of art he encounters.<sup>88</sup> Such works lead the observer to reflect, in Dias's words, on 'a totality which exists outside painting and invades it'.<sup>89</sup>

## Breaking News

The Empire endures. Thus, the issue is a matter of both painting and suppressing or negating (as well as totalising), by means of what remained outside the picture.<sup>90</sup> As is currently said, *the struggle goes on*. The cuts, the montages of

86 See image of Antonio Dias, *Brazilian Painting / Bosnia's Jungle* (1994, 60 × 160 cm), at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66239/brazilian-paiting-bosnian-jungle>.

87 See image of Antonio Dias, *Brazilian Painting / Bosnia's Jungle* (1994, 80 × 140 cm), in Dias 1994b, p. 161.

88 See image of Antonio Dias, *Brazilian Painting / Backbone* [*Brazilian Painting / Coluna Vertebral*, 1994], in Dias 1994b, pp. 162–3.

89 See Dias 1994a, p. 54.

90 See, for instance, images of Antonio Dias, *Organized Rage* [*Raiva Organizada*, 1993] at: <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra66232/raiva-organizada>; see also image of *Autonomies / Nefarious Person* [*Autonomias / Pessoa Nefasta*, 2000], in Dias 2014, p. 26, ill. 11,

the canvasses and the titles all refer to that. The pictorial surfaces enchant and intoxicate. It is no longer a matter of malaise, but of something much worse and of unlimited duration, as far as the eye can see: *the empire of genocide*.

As I see it, several recent canvasses from 2006 onwards imply such issues: *Furnace* [*Fornalha*, 2006];<sup>91</sup> *Furnace* [*Fornalha*, 2006];<sup>92</sup> *Furnace* [*Fornalha*, 2006];<sup>93</sup> *Brief History for Kids* [*História Resumida para Crianças*, 2006];<sup>94</sup> *Hostage: John Wayne Meets Harun Al-Hashid* [*Refém: John Wayne Encontra Harun Al-Hashid*, 2007];<sup>95</sup> *Lingua Franca* [*Língua Franca*, 2010];<sup>96</sup> *Untitled* (2010);<sup>97</sup> *Untitled* (2011).<sup>98</sup>

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p. 15 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).

- 91 See image of Antonio Dias, *Furnace* [*Fornalha*, 2006] in Dias 2014, pp. 70–1, ill. 34, p. 37 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).
- 92 See image of Antonio Dias, *Furnace* [*Fornalha*, 2006] in Dias 2014, pp. 74–5, ill. 36, p. 39 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).
- 93 See image of Antonio Dias, *Furnace* [*Fornalha*, 2006] in Dias 2014, pp. 66–7, ill. 32, p. 35 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).
- 94 See image of Antonio Dias, *Brief History for Kids* [*História Resumida para Crianças*, 2006] in Dias 2014, pp. 14–15, ill. 4, p. 9 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).
- 95 See image of Antonio Dias, *Hostage: John Wayne Meets Harun Al-Hashid* [*Refém: John Wayne Encontra Harun Al-Hashid*, 2007] in Dias 2014, pp. 62–3, ill. 30, p. 33 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).
- 96 See image of Antonio Dias, *Lingua Franca* (*Língua Franca*, 2010) in Dias 2014, pp. 52–3, ill. 24, p. 28 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).
- 97 See image of Antonio Dias, *Untitled* (2010) in Dias 2017, p. 56 (PDF page number), at: <http://www.nararoessler.com.br/usr/library/documents/main/33/antonioidias-gnr-portfolio.pdf>.
- 98 See image of Antonio Dias, *Untitled* (2011) in Dias 2014, pp. 46–7, ill. 21, p. 25 (PDF page number), at: [http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812\\_dias\\_catalogo\\_site.pdf](http://www.iberecamargo.org.br/Site/uploads/multimediaExposicao/250320141812_dias_catalogo_site.pdf).



**PART 3**

*Against Formalism: Art, History and Criticism*







## Work, Art and History: A Counterpoint between Periphery and Centre

### Argan in Brazil

Seen from Brazil, the work of Italian art historian and critic Giulio Carlo Argan appears as a unique case that demands analysis. At first glance, he might seem to be a national author, incorporated into the current references, practically as a 'local classic'. In this sense, Argan can be said to occupy a place that is, in some respects, even more prominent than in Italy. There, in fact, despite being a prestigious historian, master of many generations, ex-mayor of Rome and senator, Argan is a historian and critic among other renowned authors like his teacher Lionello Venturi, his colleagues Roberto Longhi and Cesare Brandi, his students Filiberto Menna and Manfredo Tafuri, not to mention many other influential critics, all with their own works and public.

To start with, let it be said that in September 1959 Argan, at the invitation of Brazilian critic Mário Pedrosa, not only participated in but also presided over the international congress of art critics *Brasília, The New City – Synthesis of the Arts* [*Brasília, Cidade Nova – Síntese das Artes*] as vice-president of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA). The congress, enjoying the status of a state event, preceded by a few months the inauguration of Brasília and was opened by the President of the Republic, Juscelino Kubitschek. Dozens of internationally renowned figures at the time from the fields of architecture, criticism, and art history took part in the event.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The conference took place in three different cities in Brazil: it was opened in Brasília, at the seat of the Federal Supreme Court (17–19 September). Then it continued in São Paulo, at the auditorium of the newspaper *Diários Associados* (21–22 September 1959), and it ended in Rio de Janeiro, at the school of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ) (23–25 September). Among the participants were the Englishmen Roland Penrose and William Holford, the Austrian Fritz Novotny, North Americans Richard Neutra, Douglas Haskell, Meyer Schapiro and Anthony Bower, Italians, besides Argan himself, Gillo Dorfles and Bruno Zevi, Frenchmen André Chastel, Jean Leymarie, Françoise Choay, etc. In the Brazilian delegation, besides Pedrosa himself, as organiser, there were leading figures in architecture, like Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, the critic Mário Barata, etc.

However, despite the fact that the conference had a strong impact on specialised journals and larger media outlets<sup>2</sup> at the time, many intellectual generations have gone by since then. Therefore, since the memory of the event has already vanished, it is unlikely that Argan's current editorial importance is due to such origins.<sup>3</sup>

In effect, the current phenomenon dates back to the early 1990s, when, in fact, Argan's work achieved editorial success, amplified by several titles and editions,<sup>4</sup> and consolidated as a current academic reference in Brazil. It is possible, if not probable, that the Brazilian case partly derives from the Argentine one, as once occurred with geometric abstraction, which in the early 1950s extended from Argentina and Uruguay to Brazil as well. It is a fact that in Argentina, where Argan was already published since 1957,<sup>5</sup> his work became more influential since that time. Thus, in 1961 Argan taught a course at the Instituto Universitario de Historia de la Arquitectura, in Tucumán, later transcribed and published.<sup>6</sup> Equally, in 1961, 1962 and 1965, in Buenos Aires, Argan was a member of the jury of the International Sculpture Prize of the Torcuato di Tella Institute.<sup>7</sup> In such circumstances, Argan visited Latin America a few times. Thus, his large work on the baroque, *L'Europa delle Capitali* (1964),<sup>8</sup> shows keen attention to the specificities of the colonial baroque imbricated by indigenous and local contributions, and distinguished, in Argan's book, from the metropolitan forms.

At any rate, the current impact of Argan's work in Argentina, judging by the scarcity of recent editions, unless I am mistaken, does not compare to the Brazilian case. Besides, considering the historical Argentine case and the

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2 On the AICA conference, see Rosseti 2009. For a detailed survey of the repercussion of the congress in major newspapers and specialised publications, see Capello 2009.

3 Equally remote is the fact that Argan was the commissioner responsible for the selection, on behalf of the Venice Biennale, of the Italian artists who participated in the 7th São Paulo Biennial, opened in September 1963.

4 Argan 1992, 1993, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2010 (all in Portuguese).

5 See Argan 1957 and 1960 (both in Spanish).

6 See Argan 1973 (in Spanish).

7 See Argan, Brest and Sweeney 1962 (in Spanish). In 1961, Argan was part of the jury, alongside Romero Brest. In 1965, Alan Bowness was part of the jury together with Argan and Romero Brest. Information regarding these participations is available in the archive of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. See ICAA RECORD ID, respectively, ICAA-760311 and ICAA-758318, section 'search: argan' of the website of the *International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*. Retrieved 20 January 2017, at: <http://icaadocs.mfah.org/icaadocs/>.

8 Argan 1964 (Italian original edition).

Brazilian phenomenon together, the issue that remains is Argan's significant impact, not only in Brazil but also in two peripheral Latin countries. Another indicator of the same phenomenon is the high number of reviews, articles, and manifestations that occurred on the occasion of the launch of Argan's works in Brazil, signed by active personalities not only in art history and criticism, but also in exhibition curation.<sup>9</sup> (I mention them but I will not privilege any of the texts on the Brazilian reception in particular, since I will later inquire into the historical function of reading Argan in Brazil on another plane of inquiry. Accordingly, I will seek past factors in the Brazilian critical tradition for the interest in Argan – of which the mentioned texts are in their own way indicators).

That said, this is not an unprecedented phenomenon. The Brazilian intellectual milieu is historically porous and receptive. There are several cases of foreign intellectuals who, whether as visitors or temporary residents (Blaise Cendrars, Roger Bastide, Fernand Braudel, Claude Levi-Strauss, Le Corbusier, Pierre Monbeig, Jean Maugué, Stefan Zweig, etc.) or as permanent residents (Anatol Rosenfeld, Lina Bo Bardi, Osvaldo Coggiola, Lorenzo Mammì, Daniele Pisani), were welcomed by the local milieu and quickly integrated, as full individuals and as Brazilian authors – luckily for their readers and interlocutors, and for the enrichment of our debates.

### Out of Step

Nevertheless, despite previous similar cases, in the case of Argan there remains a relative cultural phenomenon, to be specified. In this sense, we may start by noting that the phenomenon does not come from the outside, nor is it of the order of cultural reproduction. It comes from a genuine adoption, since it presents no parallels with the current repercussion of Argan's work in historiographic and critical centres, highly valued by the Brazilian academic milieu.

Let us go over basic facts: a mere quick consultation is enough to prove that Argan's works published in English (USA, UK, etc.) are rare, although it

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9 See Naves 1992, pp. xi–xxiv; Duarte 1992, pp. 6–7; Mammì 2003. In addition, at the launch of *História da Arte Italiana* [History of Italian Art] in Portuguese, Maria Antonia University Centre (Centro Universitário Maria Antonia-USP), of the University of São Paulo, held an Argan Seminar (10–12 November 2003) that attracted a considerable audience. It should also be noted that the influential *Vitruvius* online journal of architecture published three reviews, in May and October 2004 and August 2006, of Argan's books. See, respectively, Martins 2004, Alcântara 2004, Santos 2006. See also Mammì 2010, and his interview in Gioia 2010.

was in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* where Argan published in 1946 a startling interpretation, socially and politically contextualised, of Brunelleschi's dome, which attracted Erwin Panofsky's attention to the then young scholar. Argan's perspective constituted a thought-provoking and original re-reading, which radicalised Panofsky's iconological studies on linear perspective as a symbolic form (1927),<sup>10</sup> transposing them to a socio-historical terrain.

In French, on the other hand, in which the availability of Argan's works is much greater, what stands out is oblivion. A strong indication of that is the great availability of Argan's books in French, which can be acquired for less than five euros from secondhand book shops on the internet.

Argan was certainly widely published in Spain. But I leave the Spanish case to one side because Spain is not a country with direct or exemplary cultural influence on Brazil, while Anglo-American and French authors become quickly available on Brazilian shelves. In addition, among the various Spanish peculiarities that can act in favour of Argan's reception (organic interest in the baroque, linguistic proximity, etc.), there is the fact that Spain, like Brazil, is a semi-peripheral Latin country. Thus, such cases only tend to bring a further sample to the basket under scrutiny.

Other questions therefore arise: what do such discrepancies around the reception of Argan's work ultimately entail? And in what ways do such discrepancies matter and affect, if this is the case, the peculiarity of Argan's reception in Brazil?

### Against the Tide

Argan was one of the last exponents and remnants of a lineage of historians with the ambition of systematically reflecting on the arts, in dialectical counterpoint to the general historical process. His interlocutors in this *démarche* – Frenchman Pierre Francastel,<sup>11</sup> North American Harold Rosenberg and Brazilian Mário Pedrosa – died earlier.

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10 See Argan 1946 (English translation).

11 Despite the prevailing indifference to Argan's work among English-speaking readers, it is noteworthy that in January 1979 Argan published in the magazine *L'Espresso* an insightful review of a book by a new historian – then young scholar of the University of Leeds, at the age of 35 – whose first work was being launched in an Italian translation: Timothy J. Clark, *Immagine del Popolo: Gustave Courbet e la Rivoluzione del '48*; see Clark 1978. In the article, Argan emphasises the originality of the young researcher and recognises him as

What happened to Argan's work in France is revealing. The fact that the importance of his work was forgotten is probably similar to what today surrounds Francastel's lessons and writings. In fact, the work of this historian and researcher, whose course at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), in Paris, polarised opinion in the 1960s, is now practically relegated and no longer read or discussed. Reprints of Francastel's books virtually ceased in the late 1980s, except for one book in 1990 and another in 2013: *Art et Technique* (1956).

The fact that Argan and Francastel were forgotten in France is possibly linked to the wave of negation of historical judgement, in turn linked to the intellectual and public favour obtained by structuralist and post-structuralist authors, who took the rejection of historical thinking as their leitmotif. In one way or another, this avowedly anti-Hegelian – but ultimately anti-Marxist vogue – anticipated the announcement of American 'neocon' ideologist F. Fukuyama on the pseudo 'end of history'.

### Where Does It Come from and Where Does It Go?

Not coming from Paris, New York or London, would the Brazilian interest in Argan be in fact of local origin? When we reverse the search direction, what traits does Argan's oeuvre give us? Besides reflection with a strong historical tenor, there is another mark, also of Hegelian origin, that characterises Argan's investigation and makes it discrepant in relation to contemporary trends: the fundamental role attributed to the connection between work as experience and reflexive formation.

Thus, contrary to the idea that the work of art presents a precious good with intrinsic value that is foreign to common work, which still permeates, in various forms, most of art studies, Argan's research is based on an opposite premise – namely that art is a mode of value production among others, and therefore historically circumscribed. In this condition it is, above all, a paradigmatic form of work.

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someone who follows the same path as him. Thus, he confronts Clark's work with the methods of Arnold Hauser and Frederick Antal – which Argan does not endorse – to then approximate Clark to the line of work of Francastel, one of his close peers. Argan also extols 'the bohemian-avant-garde antithesis, clearly specified by Clark', as a 'fine key [*un'ottima chiave*]' for the interpretation of Courbet. See Argan 1979, republished as Argan 1981b, pp. 185–7.

Given such discrepancies – that make Argan's impact, for some, even more puzzling – the set of studies collected in *Storia dell'Arte Italiana* (History of Italian Art [hereafter HIA]), released in 1968,<sup>12</sup> offers a good starting point for the discussion of the mismatch regarding Argan's reception. Moreover, this work also correlatively provides a clue to the possible connection between Argan's work and peripheral cultures.

### Didactic and Dialectical

HIA is a vast and encyclopaedic work in three volumes. Its project is expressly didactic: it is aimed at students enrolled in secondary and university public education in Italy.

The work is therefore functional and aimed at young readers and beginners – which requires, first of all, clarity and dialogical development (a technique, by the way, of which nowadays T.J. Clark is an outstanding and inventive practitioner). But HIA's interest far exceeds its pedagogical purpose. It offers a much superior history of art in terms of density of reflection and richness of information, for example, than E.H. Gombrich's *The Story of Art* (London, 1950), originally conceived for English secondary education. In addition, for the Brazilian reader who has already read something by Argan, the set offers more. In fact, in the triptych in question, possibly due to its historic amplitude, the systemic orientation that guides the author's thinking can be clearly distinguished.

This is decisive. In effect, unlike most of the dull and schematic current standard pedagogical books – to which students of art history are usually subjected – Argan's work, precisely because it is not empiricist or positivistic or normative, but effectively philosophical – and therefore critical of the historiographical mainstream – gives rise to a reflexive and conscious approach to the author's comprehensive and systematic reasoning. Thus, in the current context – in which 'incoherence turns into virtue', according to a witty remark by Robert Kurz – Argan's work, in fact, does not fit in; not only does it not fit in with post-modernist eclecticism, but it also denies the correlated vogue supposing the irrelevance of history or proclaiming its end.

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12 See Argan 1968, 3 volumes (Italian); Argan 2003 (Brazilian edition).

### Getting Out of the Cave

The cliché of the ‘end of history’ conceals, among other surreptitious premises, the imperialist project of petrifying the relations of subalternity between periphery and centre. Against such a dichotomy, HIA provides the dialectical approach of such polarity and also confronts the latter by means of terms specific to a historical reflection on art. Thus, despite what the title suggests with dialectical irony, the work is not limited to Italy.

In effect, the title and the destination afforded Argan a strategy: address a young and broad public, subject to mass education and to the culture industry – both already pervaded by irresponsibility and a refusal of historical judgement. But Argan’s work – allow me a metaphor for explanatory purposes – is of the nature of the work of Socrates and leads the student out of the cave or out of the luxury dens of art, where the pseudo-treasures of art in power-saving mode are kept mute to the majority.

Thus, if the Italian student is the first circumstantial interlocutor, the motive, in fact, is to get her/him to settle in a historical, dialectical, and materialist point of view, extended to a broader range of interlocutors, not limited by any sort of cultural colonialism. In short, the purpose of the author was to create a reflexive history – of Western art, but not as an exclusive or excluding experience. Therefore, it is a history which finally flows into and nourishes the debates on modern art, without any hint of nationalism or Eurocentrism, as we shall see.

### Thinking the Centre from the Outside

In this sense, the pretext of the Italian case serves well, because this art, more than any other, has been, for many centuries, at the centre of art’s historical process, as a paradigm, criterion or counterpoint for other histories and narratives (see, for example, the historical reply from Herder to Winckelmann opening the series of critical responses – at that time peripheral – to central narratives).

The Italian process provides Argan with a reasoning on the historical development of the several practices and experiences called ‘artistic’, which, in HIA’s case, ranges from pre-history and then Minoan art, in Crete, to a brief chapter about Italian romanticism and futurism. ‘Very little about modern art!’ will possibly be the response of the student who started reading Argan through the three volumes of HIA. But the brevity is justified. The three volumes, published in 1968, are argumentatively linked to a fourth, *L’Arte Moderna 1770–1970* [Modern Art 1770–1970], originally published in 1970 – and then revised

and succeeded by *L'Arte Moderna. Dall'Illuminismo ai Movimenti Contemporanei* [Modern Art. From the Enlightenment to the Contemporary Movements, 1988]<sup>13</sup> – that is, soon after the three volumes in question. In this sense, the change of title, despite the links, is also explicable; it was not possible here, when speaking of modern art, to persist under the denomination of Italian, since the guidelines of modern art are totally independent from the Italian field, reduced in modernity to a peripheral position.

Therefore, it is a question of stressing the historical rupture, from the very start, with the title of the collected studies, precisely in order to point out to the student in Italian schools that modern art is not originally Italian – unlike the previous artistic forms – but something brought in from the outside, by the winds of a modernisation whose process in Italy was late.

Here, another of Argan's decisive keys arises: to elaborate the history of modern art from a peripheral perspective. In this sense, Argan belongs to the more radical critical lineage of the Italian intelligentsia, which, from Gramsci to Pasolini, conceives of modern Italy on the basis of the 'Southern question' [*Questione Meridionale*], in the words of the Sardinian philosopher. That is, on the fracture between North and South. Therefore, Italy is considered a peripheral/semi-peripheral country with late modernisation, within the planetary framework, for example, of the world-system, as proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein, among others.

In fact, for Argan, modern art was engendered from the Enlightenment and in close connection with, even if dialectically antithetical to, the Industrial Revolution – hence the prominence, the emphasis, including the title of the volume,<sup>14</sup> which Argan gives to the English case, taken alternately as peripheral from an artistic point of view and as central from a socio-economic point of view.

Thus, with the late industrialisation of Italy added to the weight of its tradition of artisanal excellence and authorial individualism, Italian art did not have the basic condition of the new art and dropped out of the new productive dynamics. In effect, the logic and energy of the transformation of modern art started to emerge from a confrontation or tension established with the general system of production, given by the overcoming of the artisanal work mode and by large-scale production.

Once all these accounts and adjustments have been made, the reader will be able to conclude that Argan's modern perspective is structured on the basis of

13 Argan 1970, 1988 (both Italian), and 1993 (Brazilian edition).

14 See Argan 1983 (Italian), and 2010 (Brazilian edition).



a double key: that of the negativity of art in relation to the positivity of capitalist modernisation, and of the awareness of the mismatch or exceptionality, demarcated in relation to the opposition of periphery and centre. Will this sound like a solidarity whisper in the ear of the also peripheral Brazilian reader?

However, it should be noted that the Italian eccentricity vis-à-vis the dynamics of modern art certainly carries the appreciation of artisanal excellence. In Brazil, in contrast, the mismatch with modern art is of a different tenor and drags along the slavery-related devaluation of artisanal work. In one way or another, these are two modes of production and organisation of work, overcome by the pioneering industrial progress in England – advanced enough to cause in Italy and Brazil a delay in the triggering of local modern art practices.

### **Unequal Modes of being Peripheral**

Let us return to the question of the Brazilian reception of Argan. Notwithstanding such inverse or symmetrical differences between the Italian and Brazilian cases – like two forms of backwardness in the face of the Industrial Revolution – is there any connection today between such mismatches in regard to modern art mainstreams?

In one way or another, since the Hegelian bias has structural strength in Argan's work, one must assume that the current Brazilian interest in Argan requires, in order to be considered, the recognition of a totalising reflexive aspiration. That is in this case, concretely speaking, a need for a system of art history. Certainly, this is an aspiration today in significant decline in many central or semi-central countries, like France. But is this contrast not due at least in part to the fact that the synthetic totalisation – which Hegel, as a peripheral intellectual, was one of the first to point out – constitutes an imperative of the late formation and of the demand for acceleration?

In any case, in sum, there is a combination of interests that possibly comprises a set of predicates in Argan's work, for Brazilian readers: 1) peripheral consciousness; 2) negativity of art before capitalist modernisation, as a historical function; and 3) reflexive, dialectic, and totalising judgement.

### **Internationalism and Modern Art: A Revolutionary Point of View**

There is another aspect that may have functioned as a Brazilian 'comparative advantage' for a more effective intuition in Brazil of the critically lucid revolutionary tenor of Argan's work.

The fact is that this Italian encyclopaedic author and specialist in Italian artistic heritage was introduced in Brazil as a researcher and thinker of modern art and architecture. This may have counted as a compelling factor in understanding Argan's premises. In fact, the modern bias or focus on current times constitutes a crucial prism for Argan, according to a philosophical standpoint, which is decisive for peripheral countries facing the need for radical change. This standpoint, in addition to having been outlined by Kant in connection to the French Revolution and the objectives of the *Aufklärung*, also came to be explicitly consolidated through the priority attributed by Hegel to the philosophical task of investigating the present.

In short, Argan's critical and systematic mode of prospection is derived from both Hegel and Marx – due to the centrality of the lessons of the work and the decisive activity of historical thinking. In addition, Argan's studies are structurally derived from the *formative experience of modern art*. In the case of the Italian historian, the latter factor implies, in addition, a certain critical shift with regard to the paradigmatic value of the Italian pre-modern tradition, which was overcome in Argan's case by the adoption of an *internationalist perspective*. That is to say, considering also the divide between peripheral and central economies, building a perspective in similar moulds to those of Trotsky's law of 'uneven and combined development'.<sup>15</sup>

### The Point of View of Work

Let us delve further into the reciprocal determination of the factors that nourish in their synthesis Argan's revolutionary critical perspective. Basing oneself on the knowledge of modern art, as a critique of modernisation, is not an arbitrary or idiosyncratic option. Such a standpoint is directly connected to Argan's philosophical choice of taking art as a paradigmatic mode of work, and work, in turn, as the basis of consciousness, following Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and then the materialist re-elaborations of such constructs by Marx.

In this sense, modern art was, among all other historical artistic modalities, fundamentally and completely conceived as work, totalising itself reflexively as such. Accordingly, modern art established as law the explicitness of its own mode of production. That is to say, presenting the inputs, disclosing the process of its own production, besides criticising its own value. Thus, Argan

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15 See Löwy 2010.

not only conceives of art among other forms of value production, but as 'work's liberation from its social negativities',<sup>16</sup> that is, as emancipated living work.

In this way, it is based on modern art – taken as the negative of the alienation that pervades wage labour in the general system of production – that Argan analyses past formations. The judgement of historical determination leads him to situate the artistic experience among other modes of production and value appropriation, specific to the time.

In this way of judging prevails what Walter Benjamin formulated in *The Arcades Project* (N2, 6): 'to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the prism of modern art – as work – leads Arganian analysis to discern in each experience what lies concentrated as a proper and specific treatment of transformed matter. That is to say, what remains as work synthesised in the material intent of experience configured from the precise and urgent indication of transformative action.

Therefore, work as organisation and effort, which in each context prefigures experience according to a project for the future, but which, in the heat of action, remains subject to the value regime of the time, emerges decanted through analysis. Thus, work, benefited by the modern analysis that confronts it with the historicity of value, reappears redeemed. That is, liberated from earlier chains, it awakens to feed the current experience of art, even in the case of the ancient object which, as potential evidence of work, subsists and presents a new value, according to an updating critical-reflexive synthesis.<sup>18</sup>

As such, every historical artistic experience, distinguished according to the prism of modern art, emerges as work and therefore as intentional transformation of its present. At the same time, the roots of modern experience are deepened and redefined. Through such a process, the past constituent elements of the artistic experience emerge by means of critical judgement. However, it is relevant that such elements of the artistic experience do not emerge as previously, because through the work of reflection, embedded in critical judgement, they come out dialectically updated and totalised.

In other words, the reinterpretation of artistic modalities of the past makes explicit constitutive elements of modern art and accordingly affirms the tenor of the latter as a historical construction. In sum, it is possible to affirm that

16 Argan 1981a, p. 139.

17 See Benjamin 1999, [N2, 6], p. 461.

18 For a comprehensive discussion of concrete interpretations by Argan, addressing classical Greek art, the Ravenna mosaics or Romanesque medieval art, based on the experience of work, synthesised and redeemed through the criticism forged by the experience of modern art, see Martins 2017g, pp. 213–30.

the 'artisticity', deployed as accumulated work, when combined with historical judgement, sets up a reflection that returns, through any path or context, necessarily to the current situation, that is, to the present, but now invigorated according to the notion of work redeemed in a revolutionary direction.

In this way, art is affirmed as a practice of knowledge of the present. In its turn, the present, as an object of work and therefore in transformation, implies a plan for the future, glimpsed as that of emancipated labour, in the exemplary light of modern art, appropriated by and for the construction of the revolutionary process.

### **Negating and Forming or Founding: Tasks of the Revolutionary Transition in the Periphery**

Having properly established the elements of Argan's work through which the critical experience of the peripheral perspective is implied, one can return to the initial issue of the exceptionality of the reception of Argan's work in Brazil, to inquire about the opposite pole: what about the specific terms of the reception of Argan's work here? What are the terms introduced by the Brazilian side in such reception?

These questions provoke another: what is the main function attributed to a comprehensive and totalising work, like Argan's, in a peripheral cultural milieu of late formation, that is to say, of scarce historiographical tradition regarding the arts, as is the case of the Brazilian circles?

Starting with the preliminary question, the scarcity of the Brazilian historiographical tradition, regarding the arts, is connected to the concrete form assumed by the critical work of Mário Pedrosa. For while the latter achieved a major critical work – from the point of view of reflexive intensity and organic quality of its relationship with artists – and had become in that sense an international reference,<sup>19</sup> his work suffered, as we know, from many vicissitudes: political exiles, unstable situations, impermanences and intermittencies due to journalistic activity, lack of institutional support, etc.

In this way, it was even possible to realise, despite everything, every once in a while, some demanding and far-reaching works of systematising orientation, such as the incisive essay on the French Mission,<sup>20</sup> and the essay syn-

<sup>19</sup> See Pedrosa 2015j.

<sup>20</sup> See Pedrosa 1998b – thesis presented in the contest for the chair of History of Colégio (School) Pedro II, in 1955 (it never came to be defended).

thesising the discussions on *Gestalt*.<sup>21</sup> Pedrosa's work, however, did not in fact make explicit and pass on to the next generations the effective elements for a historical-systemic approach to modern art – which he constantly addressed, on a national and international scale.

Thus, the exceptional results of many intense and clarifying insights that can be further developed in his critiques are presented in a loose and isolated manner, dispersed and with their development truncated by the obstacles and vicissitudes of Pedrosa's life, as a political militant who also was an avant-garde art militant.

In view of this, one can conclude that the main historical function today attributed to Argan's work in its reception by the Brazilian critical milieu is linked to the function of encompassing and complementing Pedrosa's work. Such a link is based on the common roots of both, in internationalist Marxism and in the dialectical consciousness of the peripheral condition. In this way, Argan's work provides Pedrosa's work with a materialist and critical narrative-reflexive system, endowed with a systematic outline, for its unfolding in a larger whole. That is, in the terms of materialist art history as a specific moment of a totalising critical dialectic which involves, in both Argan's and Pedrosa's essays and shorter texts, the mode of work as it is historically given – in a state of subjugation and exploitation – and, at the same time, its dialectical counterpoint: the emancipated work. That is to say, the latter as the bedrock of a new historical and social order of which art enables a glimpse, as long as it happens as an 'experimental exercise of freedom',<sup>22</sup> according to Pedrosa's fundamental synthesis.

Another problem implicated here is the non-existence of historiography of art in Brazil. Such an absence was noted long ago by critic Lourival Machado,<sup>23</sup>

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21 See Pedrosa 1996, pp. 105–220 – thesis presented for the contest for the chair of History of Art and Aesthetics at Faculdade Nacional de Arquitetura (National Faculty of Architecture), Rio de Janeiro, 1949.

22 Such a formulation can be found in many of Pedrosa's texts. By it he meant the overcoming of art objects towards propositions and situations, of which Oiticica's works after 1964 constituted a paradigm. A sample of that in English, which introduces this formula in its second paragraph, is: 'The "Silkworm" in Mass Production' (1967) in Pedrosa 2015j, pp. 147–50. A second is a remarkable recording of a conversation between Pedrosa, artist Antonio Manuel, and two other participants. In their conversation, Pedrosa opposes 'the experimental exercise of freedom' to contemporary movements such as 'garbage art, Arte Povera and conceptual art', which 'remain at the aesthetic level'. See 'Antonio Manuel. On Antonio Manuel's Presentation at the Opening of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, as a Work of Art', in Pedrosa 2015j, pp. 326–7.

23 On the absence of a systematic history of art in Brazil, see Chapter 2, in this volume.

and will probably not be solved in the near future, since it demands a historical process and an accumulation of work over generations. Such a problem even translates into the fact that despite having produced a major art critic like Pedrosa, Brazilian culture has not been able to *form*<sup>24</sup> or consolidate a systematic historiography of art, nor even to outline a continuous empirical development. In fact, in this regard, Brazil remains far below the levels of established historiographic traditions, such as those existing in similar countries of colonial origin and late modernisation like Argentina and Mexico.

In the face of this chronic historiographical lack, Argan's work responds provisionally, combining with the illuminating critical insights of Pedrosa. Is Argan's work for this reason doomed to be forgotten in Brazil, if a *formation* of a historiography of Brazilian art eventually takes place?

Apart from this provisional and circumstantial role of complementing the lacunae of Pedrosa's work, there is a structural element – decisive from the ethical, anthropological and archaeological point of view – which makes Argan's work converge not only with decisive thinkers of the Brazilian critical tradition, but also with a historical task synthesised by Mário de Andrade in the motto 'we must traditionalise the present'.<sup>25</sup>

According to this urgency, the critical negativity of modern art appears combined with the instituting task of *forming* and founding a new tradition. A task that translated into the commitment of Mário de Andrade and other modernists, such as Lúcio Costa and Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade, in building the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Service (SPHAN), the founding document of which was written by Mário de Andrade.<sup>26</sup>

This is very similar to what Argan did. He was the author of the founding document of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro<sup>27</sup> and a constant activist against real estate speculation. Moreover, 'to traditionalise the past', or to rebuild it

24 On the question of the *formation* of cultural systems, see Chapter 7, in this volume.

25 See Andrade 1983, *apud* Schwarz 1999d, p. 48, n. 1.

26 On 24 March 1936, Mario de Andrade, then director of the Department of Culture and Recreation of the City of São Paulo, sent a letter to the minister of Education, Gustavo Capanema, comprising an 18-page report with a graph about the 'organisation of a service of fixation and defence of national artistic heritage'.

27 The institute was founded on 22 July 1939, still in the fascist period, through order of the minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai, based on the study 'Restoration of art works. Project for instituting a Central Office of Restoration [*Restauro delle opere d'arte. Progettata istituzione di un Gabinetto centrale del restauro*]', presented by Argan the previous year. Argan offers a rich and detailed account of the process in an interview with Mario Serio in November 1989, encompassing dialogues and actions together with Cesare Brandi and Roberto Longhi in the process of creating the Istituto, the incorporation of

*forming* a new tradition, as claimed Mario de Andrade, is akin to Argan's strategy of revisiting the entire history of art – as he did in HIA – on the basis of the redeemed moments of living labour, as these could be experienced in some modern art.

In other words, Argan '*traditionalised*' the past by putting forth the idea of emancipated living labour as the foundation of civilisation. Underpinning this perspective, organically linked to social struggles, are precisely the power of the negativity of modern art and its most daring experiences, according to Argan.

In effect, in countries of late formation that were erected on the basis of colonial destruction and systematic suppression of previous cultures and their vestiges, the idea of constituting a specific historical reflection, based on modern art, appears as a critical perspective potentially capable of redeeming and regenerating collective life. That is, of transforming a life devastated by the predatory tenor of colonial modernisation, unleashed through imperialism and according to modernisations led by the process of capitalist expansion.

### Latent Trend

After establishing the historical and organic combination – shared by Argan, Andrade, Costa, Pedrosa and others – between the programme of recovery and preservation, and the practical-reflexive perspective of modern art, another facet of the Argan question in Brazil remains to be verified: to what extent has the diffusion of his thinking affected the contemporary artistic production in Brazil – primarily geared towards the advertising propensity to convert the present into an absolute which eclipses the historical process?

However, the divorce, estrangement or eccentricity between the spheres of artistic practice and historiographic research are very deep within the current Brazilian scene. Only the course of the historical process will allow one to establish whether or not these two opposing threads – on the one hand, that of the attention aroused by Argan's totalising historical judgement, and on the other, most of contemporary Brazilian artistic production's manifest disinterest in historical reflection – will confront one another, and which one will prevail.

The blurring caused by the historical indeterminacy between classes permeates the Brazilian visual arts milieu and today [2017] it thwarts the clarifica-

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radiology into the study of the works, the distant relations with fascist authorities, and the protection offered by Minister Bottai to the work of the young men unconnected with fascism and, moreover, who communicated with anti-fascist intellectuals like Lionello Venturi and Benedetto Croce, in Serio 1992, pp. 77–93.

tion of the professional career paths and the construction of historical projects for each of these categories. In this sense, ostensible interest in Argan's work signifies more a latent trend than an effectively established critical revolutionary perspective. For the time being, bourgeois domination over the activities of historiographical research and aesthetic interpretation, as well as the processes of hoarding and circulation of artistic assets, remains hegemonic in Brazil today and under the aegis of large private collections.

There are many young artists who inadvertently aspire to such a destiny. But the Argan-Pedrosa antidote is at hand. A little attention and patience – like the attention and patience of a mole – are enough, and these can also be learned, besides other means, through reading.



## Notes on Modernisation, from the Periphery: On David Craven's 'Alternative Modernism'

### A Critical and Dialectical Point of View

I will discuss here North American art historian David Craven's notion of 'alternative modernism'.<sup>1</sup> Let's start from a decisive critical element of Craven's elaboration. That is, from its inception, modernism is a conflictual realm, far from any unity or uniformity of principles.<sup>2</sup>

It is in the face of this tense and heterogeneous order that Craven will outline the trend of 'alternative modernism', whose trademark consists of the critical and poetic elaboration of the late processes of modernisation of peripheral countries.

Given its date of origin in the mid-1990s, it could appear as just another variation on a postmodern multiculturalist or postcolonial theme. In no way is it this. In truth, for Craven it is about establishing a reflexive system of modernism in general – inclusive of the central countries. And yet this is observed critically and dialectically from a peripheral viewpoint. That is, without the traces of optimism one finds in Marshall Berman's texts or the condemnation of the avant-garde consistent with the reflection theory of György Lukács.

### Capitalist Modernisation and Its Negation: How to Build a Negative System

In this sense, the legacy of Baudelaire, to delineate a critical project concerning modern art and correlate it concretely and dialectically to modernity – under-

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1 Craven elaborated this notion between 1994 and 1996 in conferences in Mexico, Nicaragua, and at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, where he worked. Finally, the text 'The Latin American Origins of "Alternative Modernism"' was published in 1996 in the English journal *Third Text*. See Craven 1996, pp. 29–44. Craven worked on his interpretation on the basis of the original formulation of Baddeley and Fraser 1989. See Craven 1996, p. 30, n. 4.

2 '[A] plurality of related but also notably divergent and even fractious tendencies' (Craven 1996, p. 30, n. 4).

stood as capitalist modernisation – is also claimed by Craven, who chooses as the founder of ‘alternative modernism’ the Nicaraguan poet and thinker Ruben Dario and his notion of ‘modernism’. Dario elaborated it in the 1880s and later disseminated it in Barcelona, where he was also active.<sup>3</sup>

Let me insist on this point. ‘Alternative modernism’ does not seek to elaborate a local history. This is a crucial difference in view of localist perspectives surrounded by phantasms of authenticity or originality recurrent in multiculturalisms and postcolonialisms.

In sum, the perspective of ‘alternative modernism’ is dialectically linked, in negative terms, to a notion of a global system of production of goods and services. Similarly, it rests on the encompassing critical notion of imperialism understood as a stage of capitalism linked to monopolies, which, in addition to containing the colonial and semi-colonial subsystems, includes intra-imperialist oppositions and specifically a certain historical cycle dialectically correlated to modernism.

It is therefore a project with an all-encompassing systemic ambition and in which the notions of imperialism and modernism are intertwined. How so? What other elements combine with Dario’s ideas in the first matrix of the system?

### Third World and Modern Art

The critical praxis of Craven nurtures itself as much from artistic forms as from struggles and political forms existing in the Third World – a term which Craven understood as linked to the French revolutionary notion of Third State.<sup>4</sup>

Besides resting on Baudelaire’s and Dario’s ideas, the internationalist perspective of ‘alternative modernism’ adds to these ideas forms of modern art of peripheral countries and also some so-called ‘primitive’ or pre-capitalist practices. As such, the essay published in *Third Text* chooses as an example Catalan modernism, which includes works of a young Picasso, permeated with ingredients of anarchism;<sup>5</sup> as well as the architecture of Gaudí, based on ideas

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3 See Craven 1996, pp. 30–3, especially notes 6–8, 11–12.

4 For Craven, it was possibly a matter of rescuing and renewing the term in the face of the criticism of Immanuel Wallerstein, which dismisses, as we know, the local and specific implications of the general notion of Third World, to emphasise the unified character of the global economic system.

5 See Leighton 1989.

of Dario, as well as poetic experiments combining heterogeneous materials and techniques of collage before Cubism.<sup>6</sup>

In Guell Park and the Sacred Family, Gaudí used Berber materials of North Africa, Mudejars and Moriscos, combined with industrial materials and practices derived from the poeticism of William Morris.<sup>7</sup> How?

### A Critical Theory for a Global Civil War

To take into account the assertion of Walter Benjamin – another author claimed as a framer of ‘alternative modernism’ – the appeal of the past results from a present urgency in the face of a threat.<sup>8</sup> In other words, ‘historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger’.<sup>9</sup>

Well, if historical reflection as a poetic practice derives from the contemporary struggle, in what terms are we to concretely understand the notion of ‘alternative modernism’?

The quarrel between postmodernism and modernism overshadowed the contemporary debate of art, while financial capitalism, and monetarism as a general paradigm, predominated on the global scale. Such was the scene in which the system proposed by Craven came to intervene. The 1996 essay in *Third Text* begins with a reference to this quarrel, but its author does not align himself with any side. This rejection openly refutes both factions’ presuppositions and distinct objectives. Why oppose Clement Greenberg’s ‘conventional narrative’ of modernism and his defence of the Enlightenment’s values, as much as the logic of postmodernists and localists?

Let’s begin with the background of the author. As a disciple of North American thinker Donald Kuspit, who studied in Frankfurt and was strongly influenced by Adornian aesthetics, it was impossible for Craven, in the wake of Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), to accept the mystification of Enlightenment and the ideas of ‘pure visibility’, espoused by Greenberg and his allies. On the other hand, Greenberg’s postmodernist adversaries, though younger, were contemporaries of the wave of ‘conservative modernisa-

6 Craven 1996, p. 36, n. 34.

7 See Craven 1996, p. 33.

8 ‘Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it “the way it really was”. It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger’. See ‘Thesis VI’, in Benjamin 2005, p. 42.

9 See *ibid.*

tion' bolstered by the 'fall of the wall' and the global triumph of the dollar. Did they constitute the negation of the latter process, or did they in fact mirror it?

Meanwhile, the triumph of the new order, apparently a modernising factor in certain world regions that got rid of Stalinism, in others merely reproduced the politics of the 'big stick' of the first Roosevelt, something Craven, who from the beginning allied with the Sandinista movement, well understood.

However, in the complex post-fall-of-the-wall global scene, in which the parameters rapidly expired, Craven's position, in the face of the localists,<sup>10</sup> was certainly not directed by the mechanism of anti-dialectical reflection theory and its homogeneous temporality.<sup>11</sup>

The touchstone resides in Dario as the matrix of 'alternative modernism'. Before being considered Baudelaire's double, for Craven, Dario is the poet who mocks the Christian poetry of Walt Whitman:

*¡Es con voz de la Biblia, o verso de Walt Whitman,  
que habría que llegar hasta ti, Cazador!*<sup>12</sup>

Dario is also the poet who stresses the anti-imperialist perspective in the ironic canto *To Roosevelt* (c. 1905) with the words highlighted by Craven:

*Eres los Estados Unidos,  
eres el futuro invasor  
de la America ingenua que tiene sangre indígena*<sup>13</sup>

10 Founded, not on class issues, but on so-called 'authentic values', the criticism levelled at colonialism and the values of the Enlightenment by the localists – that is, by multiculturalism and postcolonialism – actually appeared as a conciliatory and therefore suspect formula, from the point of view of the critical dialectic of Craven.

11 For Craven's specific critique of Lukács's 'reflection theory' and of the latter's conception of linear history and homogeneous time, see footnotes 19 and 23. Benjamin's critique of the notion of 'homogeneous empty time' – in which rests Craven's notion of 'alternative modernism' – is one of the *leitmotifs* of *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, but it becomes especially striking after Thesis XIII. See Benjamin 2005, pp. 84–5. Perry Anderson takes up Benjamin's question, in a similar sense, but returning to the terms of Marx and others. See Anderson 1984, pp. 101–4.

12 'It was with a Biblical voice or the verse of Walt Whitman,/ that you arrived amongst us, O hunter!' (Dario 1994, pp. 255–6, *apud* Craven 1996, p. 32 and n. 18).

13 'You are the United States / You are the future invader/ of the ingenuous America that has indigenous blood' (Dario 1994, pp. 255–6, *apud* Craven 1996, p. 32 and p. 32, n. 18).

Thus, for Craven, 'alternative modernism' is nearly the same as anti-imperialism. Would this imply the recognition of the existence of the contrary: a pro-imperialist modernism?

### Several Modernisms

I think the choice of the term 'alternative' indicates Craven's dialectical care to prevent a mechanistic use of the concept, a caution tied to his own effort to achieve the dialectical salvaging of North American Abstract Expressionism, hastily condemned by some as a supposed reflection of Cold War politics. Anyway, let's leave this question to one side for now and instead note Craven's constant anti-imperialist and active solidarity with an arms-in-hand movement, such as the Sandinistas, as part and parcel of the rationale behind his concept of modern art, opposed to imperialism.

In sum, the anti-imperialist struggle presides over the system and not the contrary, as shown from the selection of Dario's thought as a matrix. How then do we unfold and update the system stemming from this principle? In what way would such an update distinguish itself from the postmodern critique of formalist modernism and the separation of both from the history of class struggle?

### The Peripheral Experience: A Decisive Standpoint

In short, Craven's critical sidestep in the face of the dispute between localists and universalists, or, in other words, between postmodernists and modernists, goes to the colonial past and the peripheral experience, not to substitute them or compensate them through the recognition of a new postcolonial authenticity, but instead to maintain and strengthen irreconcilable resistance in the face of imperialism.

From this perspective, which is also that of Dario, colonisation did not end, but updated itself in the form of imperialism. As such, the question of the nature of its structure, including that of its future suppression, and the confronting of its permanence today, governs the selection of two other matrices of 'alternative modernism', as we will now see.

Beginning with the nature of such a structure, we enter the field which Craven calls the 'theory of history, specifically the conception of uneven historical development'.<sup>14</sup> Such a theory would be, Craven affirms, the common

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14 See Craven 1996, p. 30.

assumption of all 'alternative modernists'. Of these, Craven highlights the Nicaraguan Dario, the Mexican painter Diego Rivera, the Catalonians Gaudí and Picasso and the Swiss painter Paul Klee.<sup>15</sup> Given the contextual differences, among others, what would explain their common presupposition?

Europeans or not, they all come from processes of late modernisation, peripheral or 'semi-peripheral', as Wallerstein puts it. In any case, they experienced asymmetries; they observed historical development from a perspective that was the inverse of the countries (the Netherlands, England, and France) where the first national revolutions headed by bourgeoisies occurred. According to legend, these bourgeoisies once upon a time initiated a programme of liquidation of the feudal regime in order to launch an inter-classist modernising programme, through a common democratic platform.

However, in the late modernisation of the periphery, such a scheme – that of mythic Enlightenment and the legend of the heroic bourgeoisie which Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852),<sup>16</sup> sought to deconstruct – certainly is not valid. From such a discovery arises the presupposed critique of the 'alternative modernists', which Craven translates, according to his terms, into a 'theory of history'.

### The Discovery of a General Law of History

In support of the notion that modern art is neither uniform or homogeneous nor simply Western, Craven refers to two recent and comprehensive interpretations of modernisation. These two interpretations take the peripheral standpoint decisively into account: *Eurocentrism* (1988) by Samir Amin and *The Black Atlantic* (1993) by Paul Gilroy.<sup>17</sup>

However, for my part, to save time and to stay focused on the historical period correlated to the artistic materials that Craven mentions (Dario, Gaudí, Picasso, Klee), I shall rather focus on the elements at issue in the discussion through a 1906 study. Such text is historically subjacent to Amin's and Gilroy's interpretations – and even to Luxemburg's and Lenin's studies on the issues of imperialism, respectively from 1913 and 1916/17.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the essay in question,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Marx 2002.

<sup>17</sup> See Amin 1989 and Gilroy 1993.

<sup>18</sup> See Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) and idem, *The Accumulation of Capital – an Anti-critique* (1915); see also Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917).

dated 1906, is truly the initiator of the historical debates about the wide gap between centre and periphery, and also, accordingly, on the non-linearity of the historical process.

Thus, I prefer to summarise the discussion about 'an uneven, non-linear development that contravenes the linear concept of historical progress' – according to the words of Craven<sup>19</sup> – through Trotsky's precursor study, discussed below, whose findings were then formulated as the 'law of uneven and combined development'.

Certainly, this is not to assume that all artists mentioned by Craven read the same texts, but rather to consider that from the evidence of a certain objective historical structure, and despite unequal contexts and terms, similar discoveries were made.

The same applies to Trotsky, the formulator of the law of uneven and combined development, evoked by Craven. Trotsky participated and reflected upon a failed revolution in the periphery: 1905 in Russia.<sup>20</sup> His correlated essay, *Results and Prospects*, of 1906,<sup>21</sup> had its findings developed in conjunction with the theory of 'permanent revolution' whose foundation was such a discovery.

I will summarise the evidence that leads to the decisive dimension of the concept of 'alternative modernism', linked to both the peripheral condition as to its systemic dimension. Moreover, it is from this thesis of Trotsky that Craven's dissension in face of localist critiques against formalism becomes clear.

### Of Which Modernity are We Speaking? From Whence Comes and to Where Goes Peripheral Modernisation?

In short, in the history of the periphery, the supposed bourgeois political subject gives way to the 'automatic subject'. What modernises the periphery is Capital, which does so in its own way with its own criteria. Allow me to outline this perspective through Trotsky's clear and concrete words addressed on 21 September 1938 to the Cuban newspaper *El País*:

19 'To speak with insight and sensitivity of modernist art from the late 1800s till the post-1945 period is to *speak of a plurality of related but also notably divergent and even fractious tendencies*, some of which were grounded in a broad-ranging multiculturalism and were part of an uneven, non-linear development that contravenes the linear concept of historical progress intrinsic to western modernisation' (Craven 1996, p. 30).

20 See Trotsky 2006.

21 See Trotsky 2007, pp. 15–100.

Modern humanity without exception, from British workers to Abyssinian nomads, lives under the yoke of imperialism. This must not be forgotten for a single minute. But this does not at all mean that imperialism manifests itself equally in all countries.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, instead of political revolutions and common or national programmes with some degree of universality, currently what exists in the periphery are modifications of the relations of production dictated by the expansive force of the international reproduction of capital. Its effects: the multiplication of inequalities arising from the combination of the modes of primitive accumulation including semi-slave social relations with advanced technologies.

In the face of the subsumption of the political to the economic modernisation in the periphery, the conclusion of *Results and Prospects* is that the subject of the political revolution in the periphery is and can be only one: the subject of the wreckage caused by the revolution of productive forces which pulverise all prior socioeconomic relations.

In other words, the social subject – the historical man who emerges from a world of ruins or as progress's negative form – is the working class, urban as well as rural, who becomes reduced, as we know, to the exclusive condition of labour power, the result of concentrating expropriation by the automatic subject.

### Clashing Systems

The aesthetic theory of 'the subject of the ruins', founded upon its own tragedy, was elaborated by Benjamin counter to Lukács's reflection theory and the myth of the bourgeois revolution, linear history, and correlative progress.

Let us then make a brief confrontation before moving on, in order to concretely establish the contraposition of the 'subject of the ruins' – which underlies and sets up 'alternative modernism' – in contrast to other systemic propositions. We must also seek to specify the corresponding conceptions of the history of each proposition. The confrontation of such aesthetic systems that suppose, in their turn, different conceptions of history, further requires a complementary comparison between different political devices into which each of these systems translate.

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22 See Trotsky 1938. In this edition, the text had the subtitle 'Trotsky Tells Cuban Press'. The aforementioned newspaper was *El País*, *apud* Trotsky 2009b, p. 105, n. 1.



Thus, formalist modernism – based on the myth of the *Aufklärung* and on the correlative ideology of progress and linear time – regarded economic liberalism as its political counterpart, which presupposed bourgeois hegemony.

In contrast to such a conception, Lukács proposed, as is known, the ‘reflection theory’, establishing a correlation between base and superstructure. Craven remarked, in regard to Lukács’s theory:

the orthodox Marxist framework of base/structure is simply inadequate to grapple empirically with ... asymmetry and the attendant relative autonomy of each [of the social domains, developed within modernisation].<sup>23</sup>

In effect, such a scheme – whose correlative form was translated into supraclassist political coalitions in the moulds of ‘popular fronts’ – merely introduced an inflection or adjustment into the bourgeois model. In fact, strictly speaking, it was based on the same premises, that is, bourgeois revolution, linear history, and the ideology of progress.

What then would be the political counterpart of ‘alternative modernism’ and the correlated conception of the historical process, as ‘an uneven and non-linear development’?

Its philosophy of history can be founded on Benjamin’s ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, cited above, which is also claimed by the ‘alternative modernism’ system. With this we enter the third decisive matrix of this system and another divide that separates it from the various postmodernist localisms.

### The Subject of the Ruins or a Political Translation of an Allegory

The ‘angel of history’,<sup>24</sup> portrayed in Benjamin’s Ninth Thesis, and before whom are incessantly ‘piled ruins upon ruins’, is placed by Craven in parallel with ‘Gaudi’s modernist belief in redemption among the ruins of history’.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Craven aligns quotations and works of Dario, Picasso – for whom painting appears as the ‘sum of destructions’ –<sup>26</sup> and also of painters Paul Klee, Rivera,

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<sup>23</sup> See Craven 1996, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> As is well known, Benjamin’s allegory of the ‘angel of history’ was extracted from a watercolour by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus* (1920), at that time in the hands of Benjamin.

<sup>25</sup> See Craven 1996, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Craven quotes Picasso: ‘[a] painting used to be considered a sum of additions. In my case a painting is a sum of destructions’ (Picasso 1972, p. 38, *apud* Craven 1996, p. 38).

and others. Craven synthesises that all depart from the experience of the ruins towards a tragic and revolutionary poeticism of the fragment (collage/montage, etc.).

That Craven perceived an intersection between the theories of 'uneven historical development' and Benjamin's 'angel of history' shows us that there are more than just a few ties between Benjamin's figures and theses of history and Trotsky's precursory essay.<sup>27</sup>

### Tragic Experience vs. Compensatory Poetics

Here we may synthesise the conclusions of both matrix-essays into one thesis with two interwoven corollaries which engender Craven's system: the subject of the ruins, and his double, the angel of history, are the working class, whose aesthetic expression is the tragic poeticism of the fragments.

Its political expression is the socialist revolution *synthesised* to the democratic, that is, precisely the corollary of Trotsky's theory of 'permanent revolution'. In the beginning as in the end, the experience of the ruins opposes the farce of the restoration of the authenticity that presides over postmodern localist strategies.

Not only because these succumb to the narcissistic illusion<sup>28</sup> of restoring the unity of hopelessly pulverised anthropological communities. But because they

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27 In fact, Benjamin manifested 'great admiration' for Trotsky, according to French art historian Jean Selz's account of their close acquaintance in 1932–3 in Ibiza: 'He knew that I did not share much of his ideas, partly from Marxism (a Marxist, however, clearly anti-Stalinist, with great admiration for Trotsky) [*Il savait que je ne partageais guère ses idées, en partie issues du marxisme (d'un marxisme toutefois nettement antistalinien; il avait une grande admiration pour Trotski)*']'. See Selz 1991, p. 475.

28 For Perry Anderson's comments on the 'culture of narcissism', whose programmes advocate multicultural emphases in the late development of the oppressed or depressed *selves*, see Anderson 1984, p. 111. It is possibly from this essay by Anderson, in controversy with Marshall Berman, that there comes the judgement which seems to me to have constituted one of the decisive components of the system of 'alternative modernism': that the artistic forms advocated by multiculturalism offer a gratifying and compensatory aspect in relation to the sufferings of the dominated self. Accordingly, in my last meeting with Craven (about four months before his death), we talked a lot about his essay on 'alternative modernism'. He commented then on the importance of Anderson's essay for his work. One or two days later, when we were already leaving his house in Albuquerque (where I stayed for half a week), to go to the airport, he told me: 'wait a moment', and ran inside. He returned holding his copy of *New Left Review* 144 which he gave me as a gift – really, in its unexpected

share the agenda of imperialist modernisation, to hide class struggle and the basic experience of the working class in respect of the tragic devastation and calcination brought by capital and its wars – from which process, in contrast, Picasso gives us a stabbing image with his famous *Guitar* (*La Guitare*, January–February 1914).

From these elements of tragedy and redemption arise the system of ‘alternative modernism’.<sup>29</sup>

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spontaneity, a memorable gesture, turned by his sudden death some months later into a legacy, to which the present writing yields tribute. Today Anderson’s text in that NLR copy carries my disorderly notes written in pencil – but the yellow lines made with a ruler and text marker by David can still be clearly distinguished. Allow me this souvenir of a friendship.

- 29 Last year (2016), in a seminar at the University of São Paulo (USP), about the ‘Marxist theory of dependency’, the economist Theotonio dos Santos, one of the main authors of the theory, lamented, when he was asked by a student, that the theory of dependency had not included a correlated aesthetic and cultural elaboration. May I suggest that the notion of ‘alternative modernism’, according to Craven, can be possibly used as a sketch or base for such construction?

## Art as Work (Interview)<sup>1</sup>

*Dr Luiz Renato Martins, from the Department of Visual Arts of the School of Communication and Arts at the University of São Paulo (ECA-USP), presents a lucid and tragic diagnosis, in an interview with Quatro (Four). According to him, today's art has no power to fight against the prevailing situation of barbarism and seems to have ceased to be a space of resistance and symbolic struggle. By viewing the work of art as part of a general process of constitution of modernity and of the capitalist system of production of commodities, Martins affirms that most contemporary artistic activity is founded on the market rather than freedom. In the following conversation, he directly attacks the formalist tradition, which covered up the entire struggle and polemic around modern art. He also talks about the impossibility of resisting in isolation. Once the notion of individual authorship was totally engulfed by the cultural industry, the first step would be to become aware that we are engaged in a struggle.*

Cauê Alves

*In a recent debate organised by the online magazine Trópico [of the newspaper Folha de São Paulo] at the Pinacoteca [do Estado de São Paulo], about the exhibition Panorama de Arte Brasileira [Panorama of Brazilian Art] at MAM-SP [Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo], you made an observation based on the speech of [the artist] José Resende, in which he referred to the curator as a great agent of the mobility of art around the world ... You said the financialisation of capital and globalisation have accelerated the process of commodity circulation, and that art is part of an analogous process. To what extent is today's art hostage to the circulation of capital and the work of the artist just another commodity in this system?*

[Almost, totally.] Actually, I do not think there is relevance or accuracy when we still talk about 'art'. This is a term that was historically constituted and which

1 See Alves 2004, pp. 20–2. Cauê Alves (alves.caue@uol.com.br) lectures at the Art Department of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica (PUC-SP). Passages in square brackets are from the re-edition (2017), and were added for necessary accuracy in view of the publication in book form. Aside from that, minor adjustments, due to oral recurrences, were made during revision. I thank Cauê Alves for our dialogue and researcher Izabela Pucu from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (PPGAV-EBA/UFRJ), for suggesting this text for the book.

circulated between the fifteenth century and mid-nineteenth century. Later, the reach of the term, as it was formulated – in the case of the paradigm of ‘art’ as a disinterested activity and experience ontologically distinct from other social experiences of work – lost its validity. That is, modern art was made already against such a paradigm and one cannot understand modern art on that basis – let alone today’s art, which implies an overtaking of the structures intrinsic to modern art.

*So art no longer has an intrinsic specificity, not even as experience? What term should one use to designate art objects after the modern period?*

Today, the term art, in its current use, covers activities so disparate that one can use it only imprecisely. If, for example, one refers to the events in the context of biennials and major exhibitions, the diversity is very great. Besides, I think there is no longer social space or mental and affective availability for something ontological and intrinsically different from the commodity. Of course, there are many people who think and work in another way, but today that does not have the force of a paradigm – they are like shipwrecked people or survivors. I do not think there exists the possibility of individual work in the field of thought. The idea that there are individual authorships has always constituted a mystification or inducement to fetishism; it is something that was interesting for capitalism and for the bourgeoisie to promote. In the field of thought, art or politics, work and production have always been collective. People produce in a certain context, through certain dialogues [and joint actions, even if they are opposed, but dialectically interrelated]. I think if there is something which fundamentally characterised modern art, it was that it resided in and consisted of new work processes. What appears right ahead, in the physical object which presents itself before one’s eyes and which can occasionally be worth millions of dollars, is a mere result, remnant or record of a work process.

*How is it possible to think of the claim of autonomy of modern art, linked to the free subject and to a disinterested gaze, if modern art is only a remnant and, if not determined, is at least implicated in a historical process? What kind of autonomy is that?*

I think at this point there is a lot of confusion and nonsense. Because, in fact, the dream of aesthetic autonomy, or the contemplative ideal, was forged in the fifteenth, sixteenth centuries, in opposition to the notion[s] of [production and] work. The idea of disinterested experience comes from Neoplatonism, from intellectuals funded by the bankers of Florence. From the point of view of the

trajectory of ideas, there is a certain proximity between this notion and that of the late eighteenth century, when Kant talked about aesthetic autonomy and, at the same time, about the disinterested experience. However, Kant's aim was to found or redefine the aesthetic experience as opposed to the game of private interests and (the experience of) ownership, in full expansion at the time. In other words, what Kant sought was to define the aesthetic experience as a fundamentally public phenomenon. So he intrinsically associated aesthetic pleasure with the idea of communicability. (It turns out that the idea of aesthetic autonomy – conceived by Kant in relation to political [and judgment's] autonomy – would undergo a transformation just like society in general in the mid-nineteenth century [after 1848]. Henceforth, society and the idea of aesthetic autonomy [in the market-form] would acquire positivity). The notion of autonomy of art was thus deprived of all public tenor and came to be understood as something absolutely specific and distinct from all other activities. Autonomy of the work of art, in the formalist key, means that the work constitutes an isolated positivity, having nothing to do with other practices, such as work in general, or other cognitive activities.

*The laws governing the work of art are different from the laws of production, for that matter.*

There was a discourse of this kind, according to the ideology of many art historians. But if you follow in detail the work of the artists themselves, you will observe, I think, that most of them – or at least the most consistent vein of modern artists – sought to reformulate the notion of artistic work by bringing it closer to the idea of work. Such artists were not dealing with the notion of autonomy in its disinterested and pure sense. Moreover, if we take the notion of aesthetic autonomy in the sense of political autonomy, we will find that if there is something that characterises the rupture of what I would call the modern era in relation to the *ancien régime*, it is that [the modern activity appears to be] founded on freedom. In the art field, freedom means that the artist is able to choose his materials, procedures, themes and more, regardless of any academy or power of the Church or Crown. Modern artists produced, then, based on freedom, and, later, the work came into the market. Roughly speaking, a fundamental difference in relation to the present day is that so-called 'contemporary art' is no longer based on freedom, but on the market. It is produced from the market and for the market. The former hope that a work, by being produced in a field other than the museum, had by itself a certain critical efficacy is no longer appropriate. All spaces are administered. The street is also part of the same space as the museum, which is the space of the market.

Everything belongs to the market nowadays. The problem is that the situation is consolidated in such a way that reflexion has vanished from all fields. Art was fundamentally reflexive, as long as it was founded on freedom. Today, without practices of totalisation and reflexion, individuals only carry out empirical and specific performances in all fields.

*Why do the so-called visual arts have such a limited social reach, when everything seems to be an imagistic product in our society and the image such a highly valued product?*

I disagree. I have never seen so much space in the media for so-called artistic production or so many people visiting museums. If you consider, for example, those mega-exhibitions at Oca [Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo] ... The space of the visual arts today has nothing to do with that of [40, cf. 2017] years ago. There is no fundamental difference between that and the space of cinema or show business. Perhaps this process is still seemingly disorganised or incipient here in Brazil. But in Western Europe or in the United States, queues at museums are an absolutely brutal thing. The difficulty in engaging with art is a provincial and residual thing, which will be quickly overcome. The attitude of fetishism is much stronger than that of resistance. It has become big business; no one resists anymore. That someone may exhibit anything without any problem is part of it. It is the logic of trade. Permissiveness and lack of connection are unlimited. Official censorship, the nexus with the whole, and reflection have all disappeared from the current scene, going their separate ways ...

*What is the role of art criticism today? Where to start?*

I do not think there is art criticism today, with all due respect to those who seriously make an effort. What does one have in the space where criticism was once exercised, the newspapers? Today, there is the press release; we are nothing but a release culture. If we are all to consider something similar, which also involved the creation of tensions, which was to make catalogues with a critical spirit and historical reflexion – texts that implied explaining something or discussing some problematique, against which some resistance was developed – this, decades ago, also involved the need for debates, because certain things were not accepted, one found resistance. For example, in Brazil there were stratified notions of what constituted the national or ‘national-popular’ identity. Today, there is no longer resistance to anything; everything is possible in the symbolic field. The permissiveness is absolute. That said, although there is insignificant institutional space and room for debate, there

is a lot of work to be done. The university, as an institution, is also being destroyed, because no institution can survive in the current logic, except those of the market. However, it should be affirmed that the entire history of modern art must be reviewed, because it was totally cheapened [and turned into a constellation of fetishes, or auteur achievements,] by formalist interpretation. And the artworks, polemics, debates, and research that constituted modern art remained obscure; they largely remain undisclosed.

*What about contemporary art, is there no possibility of reflexion?*

Yes, to reflect and to combat is very important. Reflexion and combat. Now, someone who will perform on a pavement, thinking that such performance is in itself more important than a performance by someone else in a museum, only denotes a lack of reflexion. One has to think and not to act in individual and narcissistic terms. One has to be combat-aware. We are under occupation by capital. There is no longer any room for humanity. The world has been entirely engulfed by the market, which dictates institutions and the rules [of the game]. And people embark – inattentively, even gladly – on the train leading to the concentration camp of capital, of the every-man-for-himself, which is the market. The urgency of the local experience, of what each one suffers and lives, is fundamental for everyone to take back their own lives. Collectively, everybody has the possibility to resist. An isolated event, artwork or action does not resist.



## **International Benefit Society of Friends of Form and Bulletin on the Brazilian Division**

### **Classes**

The purpose of this session is to combine two investigations and bring intersecting lines to the fore. First, a distinction should be made between two historically contradictory processes in international modern art: 1) critique of form coupled with the overcoming of the art object; and 2) on the opposite side, the process of restoration of the art object, presented as a positivity and as a purpose by formalist critics and historiographers.

Let us scrutinise some of the ingredients of this clash. Negativity and positivity of the aesthetic experience and correlated practices oppose one another as much as the social forces historically implied in such processes also oppose one another. In this way, the clash between the aesthetic lines and conceptions referred to above is also, as I will show, a clash between social forces, that is, between classes and their political projects and historical alliances.

In short, the first objective is to summarise the historical processes that resulted in the aesthetic clash between the overcoming of form coupled with aesthetic negativity, on the one hand, and the restoration of the art object, on the other. The second objective is to combine the results of the first investigation with elements of the recent history of art in Brazil so as to better discern its impasses.

### **Historical Background**

The critique of form and the conception of art as negativity stemmed from the French Revolution, which caused the dissolution of the academies and the engagement of certain artists in the cause of the revolutionary republic. But the development and consolidation of these two interrelated processes were also a result of the overcoming of the non-industrial mode of production.

Intensification of the critique of form developed over the course of the valorisation of brushstrokes as living labour in the late nineteenth century, going against the subsumption of brushstrokes by the notions of form and composition, taken as value.

In the opposite field, the affirmation of the positivity of the art object – understood as decontextualised work and as an autonomous structure or independent of the situation, therefore endowed with its own legality – was established as a programmatic topic of a certain historiography of modern art in the wake of the bourgeois victory over the 1848 revolutions. Such a historiographical choice was accentuated with the liquidation of the Commune and consolidation of bourgeois hegemony, a process called the *Belle Époque* by some. According to the terms and premises of this historiographical conception, the analysis of art was advocated as value. This process was accelerated under the impulse of the social division of labour.

### Plots

Is there a relation and analogy between the perspective of art as value and that of money as the current representation of value? Is there a parallel between the conception of art as value, that is, as a self-referential relic endowed with sufficiency, according to the premise of legality immanent to the art object, and the current use of money as form and representation of value?

These are parts of the intricate plot of questions to be faced. Of course, it is not possible to exhaust them; rather, the point is to draw links and connect questions that appeal to the intuition, when we first come across the variety of episodes and forms of modern art. If arguments in support of new research result from it, it will not have been in vain.

### Tradition above Suspicion?

The second objective, interspersed with the set of questions mentioned above, concerns our recent past. We may suspect that in Brazil today, undergoing a process of *dismantling*,<sup>1</sup> two kinds of continued efforts have been combined. Thus, there are signs of continued historiographic and critical efforts in favour of the restoration of the prestige of the art object; a prestige, one should add, that had suffered serious critical discredit after the sequence of experimental propositions and practices around antiart after 1964. On a different level, political and economic actions directed at the institution of a strong currency were developed in crisscross fashion within the same social group, building links of

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1 On the discussion about the dismantling, see Chapters 6 and 7, in this volume.

reciprocity between the efforts towards the restoration of the art object and the institution of a new currency unit, supposedly strong.

If the hypothesis is verified, there will also be a parallel between the *dismantling* of social structures and relations, promoted in Brazil by the neoliberals, and the institution in Brazilian arts of a system of authors as a specific and active ingredient of this *dismantling*. In the aftermath, it will be possible to ask after the correlation between positivation or reification, in the visual arts, of procedures and poetics, and the reorganisation of the economy under the fetishist sign of the strong currency. These are points for further investigation.

### Production versus Circulation

Let us begin, then. First of all, it would be too simplistic to propose a dichotomy between practice and theory, especially with regard to the processes of modern art. After all, modern art was born as critical knowledge – in contrast to previous forms and techniques – and had its first landmark in Diderot's continuous struggle against tutelage and academic precepts.

Distinguishing productive practices and interpretive activities regarding the arts into two different fields does not imply taking both spheres as dual, hermetic and monolithic blocks, but rather to note different moments with specific but interrelated materialities and implications: such are the moments of production and circulation of art.

It is necessary to distinguish and specify also the social groups and predominant reasons in both fields, with their own situations and rhythms, throughout the historical process of modern art. Thus, when we refer to artists according to their *living labour* and – on the other hand – to historians and critics, according to the activities of judgement and *determination of current value* and other measures related to *circulation*, *conservation*, and the *hoarding* of objects, we will be dealing with social groups that are to a large extent distinct from one another, with a different, often opposing, logic of class.

### Classes and Historical Contradiction

It is a matter of pointing out a concrete contradiction: in the field of modern artistic production, socially composed by artisans or art workers, artistic practices aiming at overcoming form and at aesthetic negativity were current in the course of modern art. They were often also linked to movements of resistance and struggle against capitalist modernisation.

In turn, the sphere of circulation is socially composed of large and medium owners, collectors and art dealers, and executives linked to the owners, managers and technical staff of museums and galleries, historians, critics, etc. In sum, all these agents are linked to the appropriation, circulation, and hoarding of art objects. In this sphere, formalist positions associated with the restoration of the art object and to the affirmation of its intrinsic legality have largely prevailed. Moreover, in certain periods and contexts, this rulership has been even established in absolute terms, as we have seen in recent times in Brazil, after the end of Mário Pedrosa's art criticism and the establishment, from the 1980s onwards, of an 'author's' system, which we will discuss.

Hence, there has been a sharp contradiction between, on the one hand, the productive sphere of artistic practices, with their own movements, alliances, and discourses, and, on the other, criteria of a different kind, which permeated and involved the interpretation of value and circulation and the correlated conservation of artistic assets.

Throughout history, this contradiction has brought about much of the structure of class struggle. Thus, the imposition of meaning and value criteria, elaborated by the critical historiographical museological and mercantile device, has always been closely intertwined with the interests of collectors and owners of artworks. Such a device presents several analogies with the procedures of *circulation* and *valuation* of value.

In sum, the *production* of value through labour and the establishment of value judgements with direct impact on the creation of prices, in the sphere of circulation, are activities that contradict one another and mobilise very different or even opposing interests and social groups.

### Historiography of Art and Finance

Criticism and history of art, museology and curatorship of exhibitions all have many connections to the financial system. These connections are rarely admitted or brought to light. This is one of the challenges that confront a materialist inquiry into the historical and symbolic process of the restoration of the art object. Critics, historians, managers of circulation and collectors, active in the project of restoration of the art object, often rely on terms and premises in sharp contradiction to aspects and terms of the process of production of modern art.

### From the Notion of Fetish and Its Implications

For the course of the investigation, another preliminary and decisive question consists in specifying what will be dealt with here – under the notion of *fetishism of form*. In order to understand the meaning of such terms, it is worth referring to *Capital*, vol. 1 (Book 1, Part One, Chapter 1, Section 4): ‘The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret.’<sup>2</sup>

The phenomenon consists, according to Marx, of a certain way of being of the objects that appear as if endowed with life or autonomous. To refer to such a state, Marx sarcastically alludes to playfulness and seduction, as if objects had the ability to flirt with passersby.

As such enchantment involves the objects, human relations become empty. How can this be explained, asks Marx? And he continues:

In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, objects transfigured into fetishes appear as figures of the gods: they have come out of men’s heads and consist of concrete historical formations that condense in themselves social relations, but which seem to have acquired a life of their own. Thus, they appear to men, in all mythologies, as endowed with life. In these terms, the gods relate to one another and eventually challenge men. In sum, the category of fetish originates from nineteenth-century anthropology, and through its application Marx intended to characterise the kind of gain or surplus value that objects supposedly achieve in the face of the emptying of human relations.

Thus, to speak of ‘fetishism of form’ means to evoke, as a hypothesis, a hypostasis of form. That is, a process of attribution of life or autonomy to the form, according to the conception of certain critical doctrines. Despite the limited time available to me here, I shall try to establish the emergence and historical development of these doctrines.

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<sup>2</sup> Marx 1990b, p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Marx 1990b, p. 165.

The myth of the autonomisation of forms is old. Thus, in Ancient times, according to Pliny the Elder's narrative, a bunch of grapes painted by Zeuxis seemed so perfect that a bird pecked at them. Similar myths appear in the accounts of other ancient philosophers.

### **Pure Visibility, a Doctrine for Collectors**

In the mid-nineteenth century, through the great (so-called) universal exhibitions of commodities, the inclination to fetishism as an intellectual and discursive habit became commonplace as an extensive mass standard, boosted by the cultural industry which was already in full swing. It also penetrated many spheres of research in the exact sciences and humanities.

Thus, disguised as a supposed autonomy of forms – which had nothing to do with the notion of aesthetic autonomy proposed by Kant – a specific form of fetishism also settled within the scope of the reflections on art. It then appeared in the form of the doctrine of 'pure visibility', conceived by Konrad Fiedler, a rich heir, art lover, dilettante scholar, traveller and collector.

This doctrine nurtured the most influential of narratives in the history of modern art – one that absolutely predominated on an international scale, at least until the beginning of so-called postmodernism and multiculturalism. But the reasons for the succession are beside the point. Thus, let us prioritise the specific problem of the emergence of the fetishism of form or of formalism as a certain way of seeing and narrating modern art. The international prestige of the doctrine of 'pure visibility' and of the history of art associated with it were such that, at a certain point, one can attribute to both not only the role of a 'lingua franca' around modern art, disseminated across several continents, but also a decisive operative function for the constitution, in the United States – the new world capital of 'museophilia' – of some of the most emblematic modern art collections, assembled by technical administrations explicitly committed to the doctrine of 'pure visibility'. This is the case of the collections assembled by English historian and critic Roger Fry: the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of New York and the Barnes private collection, today headquartered in a foundation of the same name in Marion, in the suburbs of Philadelphia. This is also the case with the collection of the Museum of Modern Art of New York, assembled under the direction of Alfred Barr Jr., the first director of MoMA, and the museum's main advisor until 1967.

We shall return to and consider in more detail the emergence and development of the formalist doctrine. For the moment, let us stop here, jumping to the opposite side in order to outline the historical and artistic process against

which the formalist doctrine was constituted. A late answer, the doctrine of 'pure visibility' postulated the replacement or erasure – we shall see why – of the preceding features of modern art.

### Modern and Negative

The updating of art as a practice endowed with negativity had actually started much earlier. It came into direct conflict with the servile and conventional art of the academies of the *ancien régime*. Thus, at the latter's twilight, Diderot opposed the Academy and proposed to artists, in his *Essays on Painting* (1765), attention and loyalty to their surroundings.<sup>4</sup> The term 'modern art', in turn – although in use as a colloquial expression already in the journals (1822–63) of Delacroix – reached a critical status, referring to a practice endowed with negativity, from its adoption in January 1846 onwards, by Baudelaire, to qualify the revolutionary painting of Jacques-Louis David, at the service of the First French Republic.<sup>5</sup>

### The Four Aspects

Since then, Baudelaire regarded speed of execution as one of the fundamental features of modern art. Throughout his entire critical activity in the following 20 years, Baudelaire insisted on this aspect and related the speed of the process to the unfinished aspect of form and to the artist's commitment to sensation.

Baudelaire thus emphasised four traits of a productive way, of which David, the Jacobin painter *par excellence*, appears as a precursor and first exponent: 1) commitment to the historical moment; 2) speed of execution; 3) unfinished or summarily indicated forms; and 4) commitment to sensation.

The last three qualities are synthesised in the mode of improvisation that Baudelaire insistently exalted throughout his critical trajectory. Another decisive proof is that Baudelaire readjusted the notion of aesthetic pleasure, disregarding the importance of beauty – that is, of the sentiment derived from the contemplation of form – to emphasise and prioritise the new feeling, in aesthetic pleasure, originating from the experience of the organic link between representation and the present fleeting moment.<sup>6</sup>

4 See Diderot 1996, pp. 470–1.

5 See Baudelaire 2002a, pp. 408–10.

6 'The pleasure we derive from the representation of the present is due, not only to the beauty

### Improvisation: A New Productive Force

As advocated by Baudelaire, improvisation – such as the realism of Daumier, Courbet, Champfleury and Manet – was a crucial factor in restricting and diminishing the value of form, insofar as both improvisation and realism subordinated form to heteronomous determinations.

Let us observe such a process in painting. The commitment of David's painting to the revolutionary process, through commissions by the Assembly and later by the Republican Convention, implied a regime of labour committed to the agenda of the revolutionary process. The accomplishment of these tasks, at the pace demanded by the urgencies of the Revolution, concretely translated into practices totally contrary to the norms, as well as to the frivolous spirit, of academic art.

### Brushstroke *versus* Form

In the mode and in the result of the pictorial practice, this front of conflicts with the academic norms and with the neoclassical grammar took the path, among others, of the confrontation between brushstroke and form. Form constituted the fetish *par excellence* of the academy, the corollary of all academic teaching, the object of all prescriptions applied to the craft.

Through brushstrokes – which gained momentum and power in David's works, attuned to the urgency and values of the revolutionary process – form was invaded and overtaken through paintbrush blows, like a kind of Bastille, so to speak. See, for example, two of David's canvasses, which are excellent examples of this: *Madame Charles-Louis Trudaine* [*Portrait de Madame Chalgrin, dite Madame Trudaine*, c. 1791–2] and *The Death of Bara* [*La Mort de Bara*, 1794].

But the brushstrokes, whose effort and rhythm stand out in these canvasses, were not only a transgression of the standards of workmanship of the Academy. They highlighted the new political protagonism of the forces of living labour, developed during the revolutionary republic, from 1792 onwards.

In effect, as the political front of the petite and middle bourgeoisie, Jacobinism also expressed skilled craftsmanship, which politically asserted itself

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it can be clothed in, but also to its essential quality of being the present. [*Le plaisir que nos retirons de la représentation du présent tient non seulement à la beauté dont il peut être revêtu, mais aussi à sa qualité essentielle de présent.*] (Baudelaire 2002c, p. 684).



during the Revolution. In this sense, as a sign of labour, brushstrokes also served to highlight the specific conflicts between the effort and resistance of matter, both aspects of the experience of living labour.<sup>7</sup>

### Form *versus* Revolution

In David's work, the outstanding predominance of brushstrokes is unique to the revolutionary moment. Nevertheless, the general tonic of the official history of art when facing David's works from the revolutionary period is to this day that of rejecting and disqualifying all traces of the organic links between artistic practices and the revolution.

To this end, such paintings by David are presented as unfinished due to the painter's supposed lack of interest in art during the revolution.<sup>8</sup> This is what is affirmed, for example, in the long and detailed catalogue of David's exhibition<sup>9</sup> held during the official celebrations of the bicentenary of the Revolution in 1989. For the commissioner general in charge of the show, Antoine Schnapper, the works from the period – with the exception of the *Marat*, which could not possibly be refused – were simply unfinished. What were the reasons for such disqualification?

The alleged criterion is, in short, that form is not defined by hasty brushstrokes. This is, of course, an opinion aligned with the counterrevolution and does not withstand even a cursory study. It is enough to retroactively extend the focus of the examination. One finds the phenomenon of salient brushstrokes, even if with less emphasis, already in Fragonard, not to mention Chardin, and even in Marie-Antoinette's favourite painter, Mme. Vigée-Lebrun. One can also find a reflection on the phenomenon of unfinishedness in Diderot's work, just by seeking the entry 'Delicious [Délicieux]'; in the *Encyclopédie*.

### New Spontaneity

In short, what David did – a novelty in comparison with such predecessors – was basically an interpretive act: he changed the degree of awareness about

7 See Martins 2014b, pp. 65–82; Martins 2017b, pp. 44–54. See also Martins 2014c, pp. 101–38; Martins 2017c, pp. 67–99.

8 See Martins 2014c, pp. 101–38; Martins 2017c, pp. 67–99.

9 See Schnapper and Sérullaz 1990, see especially pp. 278–9 (116. *Portrait de Louise Pastoret*); pp. 280–1 (117. *Portrait de Louise Trudaine*); and pp. 289–91 (122. *La Mort de Bara*).

the meaning and value of brushstrokes, giving to their explicitness a political meaning and a corresponding prominence.

In this sense, the emphasis attributed to brushstrokes was broadly derived from the process of historical affirmation of the bourgeoisie; more specifically, such emphasis had to do with the individual power to influence the socio-economic transformation of national life. But it was also related to the political protagonism achieved by specialised crafts practised by small-bourgeois artisans. Brushstrokes combined the dialectics of these two new forces – that of the economic subject and that of the artisan-subject – forces that emerged politically with the revolution.

### Invisible Hand

After the Thermidorian Reaction that froze the Revolution in July 1794, David retreated from his republican revolutionary stance. He realigned for his own survival<sup>10</sup> and began a painting of the ‘invisible hand’, exemplified by two portraits of the Sériziat couple: *Portrait of Emilie Sériziat and her Son* [*Portrait d’Émilie Sériziat et son Fils*, 1795]; and *Portrait of Pierre Sériziat* [*Portrait de Pierre Sériziat*, 1795].

In the post-Thermidorian canvasses, the brushstrokes are no longer evident – except in exceptional situations, as would be the case in David’s portrait of Madame Récamier: *Portrait of Juliette Récamier / Madame Récamier* [*Portrait de Madame Récamier*, 1800].<sup>11</sup>

### Art of Crisis

Some painters resumed the vigorous protagonism of brushstrokes amid turbulent historical and critical situations. Thus, after the revolutionary painting of David, the dramatic intensification of the pictorial act through brushstrokes was resumed by Goya, in Spain, and by Géricault, in France. It is quite possible that both opted for an emphasis on brushstrokes, regardless of David. In fact, given the turbulent circumstances that followed the Thermidorian coup and the hostile reaction to the Revolution – which lasted for a very long time – David was forced to hide his paintings from the period of 1792–4.

10 See Martins 2014c, pp. 101–38; Martins 2017c, pp. 67–99.

11 On the exceptional tenor of this specific portrait within David’s Thermidorian portraiture, see Martins 2014c, pp. 101–38; Martins 2017c, pp. 67–99.

What is certain is that Goya, almost a contemporary of David, chose to autonomise his brushstrokes only after the French Revolution, and in the wake of its impacts, when Spain faced not only independence movements in the colonies, but military occupation by Napoleonic troops, etc.

In the case of Géricault, the crisis that animated his paintbrush resulted from the tragic consequences and the convulsion following the Napoleonic Wars. Thus, legend has it that when visiting the 1812 Salon (which occurred simultaneously with the disastrous withdrawal of French troops from Russia), and when seeing the only work by Géricault on display (at that time an unknown young man) – *Officer of the Chasseurs Commanding a Charge* [*Le Chasseur de la Garde*, 1812] – David exclaimed: ‘Where does it come from? I do not recognise this brushstroke!’<sup>12</sup>

### Against the Absolutism of Form

In any case, they were the main artists who opened a battlefield within art. Each of these painters, according to their own circumstances, was aligned with the republican ideology – Géricault, for example, painted battle scenes commissioned by Argentine insurgents in the war for independence. In such a front, the vehemence of the brushwork confronted the restoration of the academies, the absolutism of form, the primacy of the unity of the work, the conformism and the standardisation that conquered bodies and minds at the rapid speed of the new railroads.

Against the restoration of Neoclassicism, Baudelaire exclaimed: ‘Who will set us free from the Greeks and Romans?’ In such a way, and contrary to neo-classical clichés, he thus recognised in Daumier’s satirical strokes the weapon of the moment.<sup>13</sup>

### When Form Gave Way to the Brushstroke

In France, ceaselessly convulsed by a long civil war of classes that began with the French Revolution, there was a confrontation between the bourgeoisie –

<sup>12</sup> Michel 1992, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> The original sentence is from the poet and humorist Joseph Berchoux, of the previous generation. Baudelaire recalled it when he praised a series of caricatures by Daumier, *Ancient History* [*L’Histoire Ancienne*], affirming that Daumier ‘swoops down brutally on antiquity and mythology and spits on [them]’. (Baudelaire 2002b, p. 46).

which since 1791 sought to freeze the revolutionary process – and the *sans-culottes*, who sought to reopen it and push on with the process. The brushstroke transmitted clear signs arising from class conflicts. Such signs internally destabilised the power of form, before the astonished gaze of the property-owning classes, eager for the stability that neoclassical and revivalist formalism seemed to promise to them.

Delacroix and Daumier – himself a caricaturist, sculptor, and painter<sup>14</sup> – worked in tandem and, each in his own way, led the battlefront of the brushstroke. Such was also the battlefront of the splinter, against the hegemony of form. In some way, this was also the cause of the crowd and of the anonymous against a privileged ego. Form became a multitude. Brushstroke and splinters were both stimulated by the cause of the sensation, as developed in Baudelaire's critical writings.

The cause was joined by Courbet, whose charcoal [*fusain*] portrait of Baudelaire, in June 1848 – *The Barricade* [*La Barricade*, 1848] – resumed into a new synthesis the emblematic painting by Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People* [*La Liberté Guidant le Peuple*, 1830].

But Courbet also brought the insurrection into the arts, bringing to the barricade the insurgency of the artistic gesture. Hence, he highlighted the materiality of the facture against the reigning ideal of well-finished neoclassical form. Moreover, Courbet's synthesis also conquered the figurative plane, since he replaced Delacroix's allegorical discourse with a realist and *engagé* lyrical synthesis. Thus, Courbet, in his composition, subsumed in Baudelaire the figures of Liberty and the republican bourgeois, according to Delacroix. To these, Courbet gave the facial features of Baudelaire wearing a top hat and holding a rifle, like a republican bourgeois from 1830, and also like Delacroix's Liberty, raising the flag and appealing, with her gaze, to be followed.

Similarly, Courbet's oil portrait of Baudelaire, *Portrait of Charles Baudelaire* [*Portrait de Baudelaire*, 1848], demonstrated the new power of the brushstroke, coupled with colour. It thus expressed the pinnacle of the sensation, combined through the unique grooves left by the brushstrokes, which were doubly exposed, as a part of the skin of Baudelaire portrayed and as a particle in the surface of the canvas, all simultaneously.

Manet's depiction of Baudelaire's funeral (1867), *The Funeral* [*Enterrement à la Glacière*, 1867–70], organised by the to-and-fro of the paintbrush, has a vivid

14 See, for example, Daumier's powerfully cinematographic oil painting, *Ecce Homo* (1850), in which the brush dissolves the shapes into a whirling and sombre sea in which the light tones appear as even more macabre, like a sun on a funereal day.

impact even to this day. The strict and essential colours sought friction and harshness to announce, in disfavour of form, a new economy of colour and materials. Put together through shocks and in keeping with the quickness of sensation and the new protagonism of the paintbrush's instantaneity, the economy of chromatic shocks responded to Baudelaire's strategy for modern art: to combine abrupt shocks and emphases of tragic narrative, plus ephemeral sensations with an epic discourse – however, a discourse pervaded by the defeat of the rising bourgeoisie and therefore fragile, lyrical, and caustic.

In effect, in Baudelaire's defence of the sensation there was the certainty that form was not for the defeated – the latter being in fact a victor's prerogative, just like plundering. In this sense, the history of the struggle against the hegemony of form also expresses the memory and resistance of those defeated by capitalist expansion. This history presents dissonant gestures, still resistant to the logic of triumphant modernisation, whose form was drawn at the tip of bayonets and rifles: a form – imposed on the labour force – sold as a commodity and trained for daily submission to the wage-form.

Similarly, in certain paintings made after the massacre of the Commune, there are brushstrokes that fray the composed order, echoing and prolonging to exasperation the rhythm of social conflict. An example of the brushstroke as a mode of resistance is Manet's watercolour about the *communards* facing the firing squads arranged by the bourgeois government troops of Versailles supported by the Prussian occupation: Edouard Manet, *The Barricade* [*La Barricade*, 1871].

Remarkable moments of this process were also outlined in the works of Cézanne and Van Gogh. Cézanne resorted to brushstrokes as serial, repetitive, and discontinuous elements.<sup>15</sup> He thus deepened the key role of the brushstroke at the expense of form.

Cézanne's operations created a great problem for those who defended his painting, from the viewpoint of the value of form, and were thus unable to accept the unfolding of his pictorial process. Why?

There is not enough space for an adequate examination of Cézanne's dense and complex work. Nor can we dwell on the numerous attempts to interpret his oeuvre. I have discussed the subject in detail elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> Let me briefly outline only two or three aspects of the question that may be of interest in our discussion. First: the controversy surrounding Cézanne is illustrative of

15 See, for example, Cézanne's works: *Trees at Le Tholonet* (1900–4); *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1902–6); *Mont Sainte-Victoire Seen from Les Lauves* [*Le Mont Sainte-Victoire vu des Lauves*, 1904–6]; *The Garden at Les Lauves* [*Le Jardin des Lauves*, c. 1906].

16 See Martins 2017e, pp. 140–93.

the divide of perspectives and criteria between the spheres of production and circulation, in which interpreters, historians, critics, and others act. In fact, Cézanne's work was readily assimilated by other artists. Productive responses as significant as those of Braque, Picasso, and other cubist artists appeared soon after Cézanne's death. Thus, the path opened by Cézanne – the one he referred to when he said, 'I am the primitive of a new method' –<sup>17</sup> was soon followed and developed by other artists. But this was not the case with historians and critics.

### The Viewpoint of Labour

The second aspect I will only briefly mention, since it is subsumed in the third: the interpreters' incomprehension in the face of Cézanne's work was precisely because the reflection on the experience of labour, decisive in the painter's elaboration, was denied or repressed, that is, it was entirely absent from the interpreters' analysis of his time. In fact, in the spirit of the so-called *Belle Époque*, the interpreters of Cézanne, linked to the sphere of circulation, had eradicated from their minds all reflection on work, just as the historical memory of the Commune had been eradicated from civil life.

Third: the mismatch in response to Cézanne's work separating the aesthetic reflection of interpreters from the productive intelligence of artists was only overcome by Russian Constructivism,<sup>18</sup> when the issues of labour and artistic practice were placed on another level as a basis for theoretical reflection. Hence, through notions connected with the experience of labour, it was finally possible to translate Cézanne's painting method into words and explain it rationally. Evidence of this can be found in the conferences and writings of Nikolai Tarabukin between 1921 and 1923,<sup>19</sup> in which the constructivist and productivist thinker referred to Cézanne as the initiator of process-painting. On what bases?

Cézanne's painting made explicit its own productive practice and materials. In sum, it affirmed the sovereignty of process over form and composition. In other words, the key argument in the collective intelligence of the constructivist group (since Tarabukin was not an isolated author, but an organic intellectual of Constructivism) about Cézanne's work method lay in the affirmation of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See Martins 2017f, pp. 194–212.

<sup>19</sup> Taraboukine 1980.

the rights of living labour, its means and materials, against form, viewed as a double of coagulated or dead labour.

Put simply, the process or mode of pictorial fabrication – what the Russian constructivists called *faktura* – to designate the ‘conscious use of material’ (as Christina Lodder summed up based on Aleksei Gan) –<sup>20</sup> opposed form, becoming more relevant than the positivity of the result or of the finished form, for Cézanne and others. It was a matter of affirming the sovereignty and rights of the experience of labour in its living mode.

Thus, despite the fact that the adherents of the formalist perspective took Cézanne’s work as the root of a new discursive system – which led to the vision of a new modern classicism and to bizarre ‘neo-Cézannisms’ –<sup>21</sup> the emphasis on the process, disavouring the positivation of the result, corresponded to the materialist political response that advanced politicised fractions of modern art would later develop. Responses of this tenor were elaborated not only in anti-academic terms, but also with a critical and negative bias before the current commodity production system.

### International Benefit Society

Let us put the angle of the artists aside for now. After the Commune massacre in the Bloody Week of May 1871, a new *Delenda est Carthago!* rose up against modern art thought as negativity and, moreover, as a reminiscence of popular power in the French Revolution. If, from such a condition, it contradicted capitalist modernisation, it should thus be overcome and forgotten.

The emergence of benefit societies of friends of form dates from that time. Local sections were constituted in different countries, but, due to the high quality and comprehensiveness of the social relations and cosmopolitan economic interests of their members, the national sections themselves were always part of an international society of friends of form. The first national divisions of friends of form originated from regions of the Habsburg Empire and of the new German-Prussian Empire. Those people simply could not hear about the French Revolution.

The founding members and prominent authors first came from the central empires, but their strategy was far-reaching and aimed at Paris – despite everything, the undisputed capital of modern art. Thus, the first systematic

20 See Lodder 1990, pp. 94, 99.

21 See Martins 2017e, pp. 140–93.

task – based on positivist neo-Kantianism taken as a given and current perspective in the Germanic university sphere – was to elaborate a new aesthetic doctrine and oppose it to the memory of the critique of Baudelaire and his notion of modern art. Baudelaire's criticism – which asserted the French Revolution through the Republican revolutionary art of David, the matrix of modern art – had to be erased.

The restorative impetus of the doctrine fixed on imperial soil cannot be separated from an event empirically circumscribed in Paris, which, however, polarised international attentions and interventions – as would be the case with the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s – acquiring immediate international resonance: the Commune and its massacre by the Versailles troops supported by the Bismarck government troops then occupying France. The military alliance that liquidated the Commune sealed the new Franco-Prussian *entente* in defence of the regime and values of the *honnêtes gens*.<sup>22</sup> The return to the order of the *grande bourgeoisie* disseminated a great deal of relief and tranquillity throughout monarchic-bourgeois Europe. Thus was established a class rejoicing which gave rise to the expression *Belle Epoque* to designate the singularity of the new times in which not only in Europe, but also in the newly constituted colonial domains, the great masters of industry, commerce, finance, sciences, and the arts (private collectors and patrons of museums) considered themselves the owners of the world and all its assets. Hence, the *Belle Epoque!* – or, in an opposing critical perspective, the epoch of imperialism as ‘the highest stage of capitalism’.<sup>23</sup>

### Pure Forms and Pure Visibility

For the new times it was necessary to constitute not only an art, but an aesthetic discourse that expressed the specific knowledge, qualified the organisation of collections, and constituted the technical guidelines and functional criteria of classification and conservation for the large metropolitan museums. In these, there was an accumulation of artistic treasures plundered from one another, according to the norms of war, and from the colonial or satellite territories.

Thus were outlined the historical conditions for the emergence of what came to be called the doctrine of ‘pure visibility’. Its author was Konrad Fiedler. A distinguished spirit and rich heir who travelled and collected artworks,

22 For the historical meanings of these terms, see Martins 2017c, pp. 71–2.

23 See Lenin 2011.



Fiedler also cultivated erudition and kept in close contact with artists – such as the painters Hans von Marées and Adolph von Hildebrand, with whom he elaborated the ideas of ‘pure visibility’. This doctrine was developed by the three of them but set up and signed by Fiedler in three books published between 1876 and 1887. Not only was the doctrine encouraged by the liquidation of the Commune; it was also contemporary to the rise of the impressionist movement in France. Such a conjunction between the doctrine and the movement – as its *prêt-à-porter* corroboration – enabled Parisian critics of the time to speak of an ‘*école des yeux*’ or opticalism.<sup>24</sup>

### Autonomy as Self-Referentiality

Let us limit ourselves to a summary survey of the general lines of the doctrine, which already allows us to distinguish its influential historical function exercised in its original context and shortly thereafter.

Fiedler developed the idea of what he termed autonomy of visual form before nature or any other alleged instance, through the thesis that, in the discussion of visual artworks, any reference to content that was not strictly visual would be a spurious thing. In these terms, Fiedler developed the notion of a specific productivity of the eye and, based on that, he affirmed the notion of autonomy of contemplative vision. In effect, there was little or nothing in this idea of the Kantian notion of autonomy, whose model, in the terms of the *Aufklärung*, was political and implied a refusal of the tutelage of judgement. Deprived of the notions of communicability and universality – so crucial to Kant – the Fiedlerian notion of autonomy was rather linked to the idea of specialisation and purity of an activity, regarded in isolation from others. It was therefore parallel to the social division of labour and correlated specialisations, and to the positivist division of the body into sensory subsystems, in the terms proposed by nineteenth-century physiology.

In sum, when Fiedler spoke of autonomy of vision, he sought, besides constituting vision as a speciality, to institute a self-referenced visual experience, independent of any mimetic act and external instance. Seeking to replace the aesthetic parameter fixed by tradition, Fiedler’s argument negated any dialogue between art and nature. At the time, at the height of the first cycle of global industrial appropriation of commodities, this negation seemed, at first glance, plausible and current.

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24 See Fried 1996, pp. 18–19; see also pp. 462–3, n. 51–4.

The true targets of Fiedler's doctrine, however, were others: in the artistic sphere, the realism of Daumier, Courbet, and Manet; in the aesthetic or philosophical sphere, the goal was to stop the dialogue between art and the historical process, as we shall see. That said, we now have enough elements for the discussion and can therefore bring this description of Fiedler's ideas to a close.

### Restoration of the Object

What is of interest here, in this saga of pure forms, is that the doctrine of 'pure visibility' signalled the rupture not only of the traditional parallel between art and nature, but also of the dialogical relationship between the two, configured in the terms of mimesis. This point lay at the heart of the impact and historical function of Fiedler's doctrine. Through the negation of mimesis, the decisive result of the doctrine of 'pure visibility' consisted in affirming the self-sufficiency of the artistic object before the reality of the historical process. What was the purpose of that?

Actually, since the French Revolution, the growing dynamics of the political and social process besieged and invaded, on all sides, the once pure and well-protected sphere of aesthetic experience. Thus, in his critical work, Baudelaire had not only presented the art of David elaborated for the revolutionary republic as a starting point of modern art,<sup>25</sup> but he later associated the development of modern art with the revenge of the vanquished and massacred in June 1848, against the triumphant bourgeoisie and the Second Empire.<sup>26</sup>

### From the Given Void to the Construction of the Historical Void

The doctrine of 'pure visibility' was thus established in a historical void – whose eloquent illustration consisted of the sepulchral silence following the Holocaust of the Commune. In this way, it was not even necessary for the criticism of the time to debate Baudelaire's judgements and criteria. They had turned the page. In summary, from then on, a condition was mandatory in order to eliminate and systematically disregard all historical traces. Both the circumstantial ones, intrinsic to the moment of elaboration of the artwork, as well as those of greater scope implicated in the structure of the work, with a tenor of reflection and judgement of the major historical process.

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25 See Baudelaire 2002a, pp. 408–10.

26 See Martins 2014a, pp. 27–44; Martins 2017a, pp. 14–28.

The purging of all historical traces from modern art – except those traces related to the supposed exclusive history of forms – has since become a *sine qua non* principle of formalist discourse, in both criticism and historiography.

Many misunderstandings resulted from this position, which was averse to any dialogue of painting with the real and with the historical process. Examples of this are the interpretative problems of the formalist historiography and criticism of Manet's *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian* [*L'Exécution de Maximilien* [*Die Erschießung Kaiser Maximilians von Mexiko*], ca. 1868–9], whose explicit connection with the circumstances and with the theme was blindly and categorically denied by formalist historiography.<sup>27</sup>

To counteract the idea of negativity of art (originated, as we have seen, from the French Revolution) and to circumvent the impasse created by the denial or refusal to interpret the historical process, the formalist operation of rupture with the mimetic function defined a regime of isolation as to the situation of art. As I have pointed out, such a regime alleged the self-referentiality of the artistic practice. Its corollary consisted in postulating, immediately and in specific aesthetic terms, the positivation of the object.

### Vacuum Art

In the following years, the art object – regarded as an autonomous, self-sufficient, and self-referential reality – occasioned the elaboration of a set of categories referring exclusively to the new economy of the visual art object. This lexicon was achieved according to the doctrine of 'pure visibility', by the formalist historiography of Julius Meier-Graefe and his counterparts.

Accordingly, there was an immediate transition from the doctrine of 'pure visibility', relative to the visual experience, and then from the lexicon of the new categories related to the art object, towards the elaboration of a history intrinsic and exclusive to forms. This is what the Paris-based, German, erudite art dealer Meier-Graefe did by weaving his so-called autonomous narrative of modern art through supposedly pure and exclusive terms.

Meier-Graefe set a canon with a book entitled *Manet und der Impressionismus*, published in 1897–8, 30 years after Baudelaire's death and 15 years after the death of Manet. In his book, Meier-Graefe inscribed Manet within Impressionism as its precursor and founder. According to Meier-Graefe, Manet led, as a precursor, to the inaugural recognition of painting as flat decoration by

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27 See Martins 2017d, pp. 100–16.

relentlessly suppressing all elements used by the old masters to seduce the eye through the effect of depth, called plastic illusion according to the positivism of 'pure visibility'. In 1903–4, Maier-Graefe published *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst: Ein Beitrag zur modernen Ästhetik*, in three volumes.<sup>28</sup> In this work he sought to systematise the history of modern art, reiterating the idea of the development of painting as a so-called autonomous and exclusively flat language, contrary to the plastic illusion and to any narrative or referential intention, thus constituted of strictly pictorial elements.

It is known today that Meier-Graefe's works had prolific progeny, as his ideas were often repeated in manuals and vulgates about modern art, widely available up until the advent of so-called postmodernism.

### For Buyers

In the wake of Meier-Graefe's books, English scholar Roger Fry, later the technical director of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, abandoned his studies of Italian art to dedicate himself to modern art, following the criteria proposed by Meier-Graefe. In 1910, Fry organised an exhibition of French painting, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* (London, Grafton Galleries), and, in 1912, the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* (London, Grafton Galleries). The formalist version of modern art was disseminated among museums and collectors in Europe and the United States, being used as an international 'lingua franca' of managers and technicians linked to the institutions of *circulation* and conservation. It soon became the official language of the different national circles of 'friends of form'.

### The Contradiction

There is, after all, a bipolar scheme. Briefly speaking, on the one hand, there were societies or circles of friends of form, in whose core acted, among others, the authors who conceived and disseminated formalistic criticism and historiography. Such discourses carried organic links with the sphere of *circulation*: galleries, museums, private collections, and the art market. On the other hand,

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28 Meier-Graefe 1904. English translation: Meier-Graefe 1908. For details on Meier-Graefe's writings and his influence on other critics, such as Maurice Denis and Roger Fry, see Shiff 1986, pp. 155, 276 n. 24; see also Kultermann 1993, pp. 154–6.

practices of dissolution of form and processual ones, rooted in the principle of negativity of modern art, originated from the sphere of *production*.

In these terms, a fracture line is observed according to which the fundamental contradiction of modern art is outlined. This contradiction pervades modern art's origin, development, and historical function in the different instances and contexts in which it manifested itself. In short, over the course of its development, modern art divided into different forces, impulses, and actions, sometimes centrifugal and sometimes centripetal in relation to the vortex of the process of capitalist modernisation. Therefore, modern art did not constitute a unified discourse or universe, but rather a field of constant conflagration between opposing and disparate tendencies, with rare periods of truce in their civil war. In this sense, Baudelaire, as the first theoretician of modern art, certainly elaborated well-defined criteria about what he understood to be modern art, even though he did not have the time to develop a fully fledged explanation or system.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Fiedler, Meier-Graefe, and Fry also developed well-defined ideas and were perhaps able to present them in a more systematic way than Baudelaire. However, no coincidence whatsoever was verified between the two fields and their intrinsic meanings.

### Polarities

After all, whom did modern art serve and for what? Did it serve the training and education necessary for modernisation, growing specialisation, and division of functions? Or, on the contrary, did it set the aesthetic experience, first and foremost, as an induction to totalising reflections based on egalitarian principles and negativity in the face of the international process of modernisation, generator of growing social differentiation?

In modern art there are, of course, facts, arguments, and authors, operations and productive modes, interpretations and modes of circulation that align themselves with one perspective or another, or that are even internally torn by such contradictions. In effect, it is necessary to start from the verification that the field of modern art, its cause and its movement are not a unity but contradictory in themselves. They cover diverse and conflicting experiences that have in fact unfolded the social divisions of classes, interests, genres, ethnicities, national tensions, etc. Consequently, the line of fracture between one field

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29 See Martins 2014a, pp. 27–44; Martins 2017a, pp. 14–28.

and another – in short between the negativity and positivity of the aesthetic experience – always constituted a synthesis of multiple determinations.

In other words, it may be noted that certain objective factors, whose lines of force cross the many spheres of social life, had not been extinguished from the field of modern art. Rather, they remained concretely active and, even when punctually and mechanically indeterminable at a given moment and specific work, had a lasting influence in the medium and long-term. As components, chemical or molecular factors, they must therefore be observed in order to delimit the curves, inflexions, and structuring tendencies of conducts over the course of a historical process. A consideration of these *a priori* factors preceding artistic action certainly does not eliminate the complexities related to the practices of elaboration and interpretation of forms, which require specific examination.

### Strategies

In order to establish the course and mode of such influences that together feed the forms, I have just emphasised the sociological and class aspects of decisive protagonists of the formalist current of restoration of the art object. Analogously, I tried to emphasise the historical and social circumscriptions of the origin and development of practices of negation of form and the negativity principle. The two historical blocs developed according to opposing strategies.

Thus, in concrete terms, the formalistic theoretical, historiographic, and critical efforts were combined according to pecuniary interests linked to the circulation of objects towards the elaboration of discourses focused on the critical definition and legitimization of the object. Accordingly, such object was, after all, monetisable, insofar as art was assumed to be in the sphere of circulation not only as symbolic value, but also as a commodity.

In this sense, formalism developed a positive grammar for judging and qualifying the object. Faced with growing circulation, the goal of formalism was to accurately and pertinently specify its constitutive qualities so as to differentiate one object from another and thus establish their specific value. Such was the function exercised by notions related to visual syntax, such as planarity, anti-illusionism, self-referentiality, etc. Correlatively, the critical analysis of pictorial discourse sought to define and designate the fundamental components of language: plane, line, point, colour, etc.

On the opposite side, strategies to negate the notion of form (that is, the positive circumscription of pure aesthetic experience and the related positive definition of art) sought to point out heteronomies of aesthetic form and exper-

ience. Thus, porosities and openings to the tensions and social struggles were distinguished and the suspension of the differences and exclusivities of materials and procedures of the aesthetic experience were observed with regard to other modes of value production. Ordinary and everyday materials were brought into the art scene, through Cubist collage, the German Dada movement, the objects of Surrealism. The objection to the positive definition of art went through negations, like processual art, Dada art, the Soviet constructivist/productivist movements and Factography, until it reached the antiart proposed by Hélio Oiticica, which Mário Pedrosa pointed out as an overcoming of modern art.<sup>30</sup> As a consequence, instead of definitions of the object, the examination of the varied exercises of negativity, more often than not, resulted in cartographies and histories of concrete processes.

### Pending Matters

The contradictions and fracture line of modern art are rarely evidenced. They are often lost or buried under an avalanche of names and facts, lines and experiences. Hence the reason for the journey made so far. However, although disclosed in such terms, the contradiction cannot be easily resolved. Investigations that are careful and attentive to the different historical moments and circumstances signalled that, according to the context, one current of modern art has prevailed over another in alternation; they sometimes clashed and sometimes merged into one another.

Faced with such complexity, one need also recognise that many people would be willing to offer a counter-argument, rejecting the approach proposed here between the discourse of aesthetic and formal purity and pecuniary interests. In effect, it is known that the defence of aesthetic autonomy and its disinterestedness have always been postulated by the formalist perspective when it comes to art. It is a fact, then, that this argument has always served to characterise the opposition between the interested actions that aim at an asset, like any act of work or investment, and the contemplative aesthetic experience, regarded as pure and disinterested *per se*. Beyond the logic and coherence of the arguments, however, actions and facts observed historically are displayed.

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30 See Chapter 4, in this volume.

### The Point of View of the Periphery

But neither the play of arguments nor the clash of abstract and generic statements will solve the contradiction and complexity of the plots and stories inherent to the general field of modern art. Nor does an overview of the river basin of modern art allow us to unveil, within this labyrinthine web of variants, the conflicting fractured interests, that is, the dividing line stressing the fundamental contradiction of modern art.

Let us take a leap towards a concrete and historically determined context. Let us move on to our second objective. We will now try to combine the second line of research, focusing on recent Brazilian history, with the data and elements obtained in the first investigation. We now have an advantage we did not have during the first investigation. Indeed, if something can be learned from the outset from the dialectics between centre and periphery, from the law of uneven and combined development, from the peripheral historical experiences, as well as from the debates proposed by the Marxist theory of dependence, it is that the comparison between periphery and centre teaches us that the contradictions in the periphery come to be exposed and revealed more sharply than in the societies of the central economies.

### Form and Money

Thus, in the central countries, the relations between form and money are somewhat ambiguous; they often obscure themselves or dissimulate their nexuses. In Brazil, in turn, like in other peripheral economies, such relations stand out sharply. However, this is not enough to make them legible because factors of another order obscure the view of many. In this sense, I will highlight certain facts that belong to the order of the relations of dependence between peripheral and central economies, and propose giving attention to some ties and reciprocal determinations that act in the power play in question.

Let me first focus on some parallels between values and modes of form and money in this peripheral and certainly smaller section of the global art market. Question: among all possible objects that circulate socially, which is the one that extends the trend of self-referentiality and affirmation of its own form to a paradigmatic level?

In effect, it is none other than money. The pretence built into the so-called general equivalent is to correspond to the face value it declares, and to being unaccountable, not referring to anything but itself. Only when currency is discredited does its declared value decrease and, as a consequence, lose in



self-sufficiency and positivity. Consequently, its drop in credit is combined or mediated by an external process (crisis of the responsible state authority or power, inflationary process, various uncertainties, etc.). Except in the moments in which such debilities do occur, it is inherent to money, whenever it is considered as a strong and sound representation of value, to seem unquestionable and to correspond exactly to its face value, presenting it as identical to itself. Thus, in the condition of a major fetish, in order to have effective credibility, money implies the suppression of the rest of the historical process, eclipsed or erased by the concentrated affirmation of self-declared monetary value.

### **Astral Conjunction in the Skies of Brazil**

Relations of tangency, coincidence or even of convergence between the process of reconstitution of the art object and a certain liberal analysis of the economic and political process – expressed according to a perspective based on the notion of a strong currency – were presented in recent Brazilian history. The conjunction of such phenomena, apparently disparate and distant from each other, is intriguing and worthy of examination.

Beyond conjectures, a concrete coincidence must be considered. There was an operational synchrony between the liberal analysis of Brazilian economy – which then gave way to a monetarist plan of reorganisation of the economy, the so-called Real Plan [Plano Real] – initiated with the launch of a 'scriptural currency', the URV, on 27 February 1994 – and the Brazilian renewal of the formalist art criticism of Clement Greenberg – which had fallen into disrepute in the United States since the early 1960s, after having enjoyed great prestige in the USA in the Cold War years.

Greenberg's art criticism texts were published in Brazil in 1996,<sup>31</sup> during the hegemony of monetarist ideas in the country. The launch of the plan had enabled Fernando Henrique Cardoso to ascend, in ten months, from minister of finance (May 1993 to March 1994) to candidate for the presidential succession of Itamar Franco (whose term in office lasted from 29 December 1992 to 31 December 1995). The prestige of the currency, called 'real', would still guarantee Cardoso's re-election in 1998, despite the exchange crisis that the most well-informed and acute observers were already detecting.

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31 See Greenberg 1996 (Brazilian version translated from Greenberg 1984), and Greenberg 1997. For reviews of both, see Martins 1997a, pp. 4–5; and Martins 1997b, p. 5.

The key strategy of the so-called Real Plan (1994) consisted precisely in substituting a weak currency with a supposedly strong one, anticipated and prepared by a virtual currency with an accounting or 'scriptural' value, as was said at the time. As for the launch of the Brazilian edition of the Greenberg book that took place in 1996 – and two-and-a-half years being a reasonable time for the editorial preparation of a book, including translation, graphic design and editing – it is reasonable to assume that the launch of the Real Plan and the decision to publish Greenberg's texts were contemporary with one another. Mere coincidence, inspiration or synchrony? In fact, both mirrored and shared certain analyses of the Brazilian situation.

### Gems of 'Associated Dependence'

First, let us look at other parallels. Neither the fate of the currencies nor the prestige of the strong forms in art constitute, as we know, a matter of national decision – except in exceptionalities such as revolution or war, which is not the case here. On the contrary, and especially in cases of congenital dependency, as is typical in the peripheral economies of which Brazil is part, it is in the wake of international waves that a peripheral country consecutively adjusts. The law of the jungle prevails on the financial plane, on the symbolic plane of the arts and also on the political plane, as we shall see later, in another series of coincidences.

Therefore, it is relevant to note that the coincidence of diagnoses and the emergence of discourses and decisions, consolidating parallels between the doctrines of the strong currency and strong form, did not constitute a singularity made in Brazil. In effect, an analogous astral conjunction was verified in the skies of France a couple of years earlier. Let us recall that the Maastricht Treaty, signed on 7 February 1992, and countersigned in the following months in the signatory countries, sanctioned the free circulation of capital. Subject to the prior adoption of economic austerity programmes for all member countries (of the European Community then converted into European Union), the Maastricht Treaty simultaneously instituted a plan of preliminary measures for the establishment of the single currency which, according to a subsequent resolution on 16 December 1995, would be called the euro. Thus, although the euro itself could only be put into circulation later,<sup>32</sup> it can be affirmed that since

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32 After a transitional period, initiated by the Maastricht Treaty, in which the ECU (European Currency Unit) prevailed as the referential currency, the euro was introduced, also as a

the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, its virtual existence was established for adoption throughout Europe. Since Maastricht, people began to follow the monetarist creed, waiting for its concrete advent. (The Brazilian script, with the adjustments intrinsic to its agenda, synchronised with the electoral calendar and other interests, followed the logic – observing the peripheral limitations – of the same scheme of first introducing the provisional accounting currency and then the effective monetary circulation unit).

In such circumstances, it was in the course of 1993, when the advent of the European single and strong currency started shining on the horizon, that the Centre Georges Pompidou held the *Greenberg* seminar (Paris, 19–20 May 1993).<sup>33</sup> Would it be a coincidence that precisely when the euro's aura of strong currency glowed, amidst crisis and scepticism, the criteria and key notions of the New York theoretician of strong form were introduced with pomp and circumstance in the French milieu?

In Brazil, the diagnoses that the two perspectives in question made – one of the crisis of Brazilian economy and another of the Brazilian artistic process<sup>34</sup> – converged in the affirmation that the debility of the currency and of form constituted symptoms of a disease, whose cure would be mediated by, among other associated factors, the active principle of market dynamisation.

The title attributed to the new currency – 'real' – seeking to take advantage of the double meaning of the term in Portuguese – as a noun and as an adjective – is illustrative of its ambition: to establish, according to the meaning of the word as a noun referring to the currency (the 'real'), a new kingdom of transcendent or divine right – in any case extra-social. Moreover, according to the meaning of the term as an adjective, everything else, contrasted to this fact or new kingdom, said to be 'real', should in principle appear as unreal, virtual or false. It was a linguistic artifice worthy of being included in the Newspeak of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). In any case, it was enough to successfully plot a new presidential candidacy. Such fabrication lasted four years and helped a mystified re-election, immediately followed by a revelation, in the transition to the new presidential term, of the weakness of the formerly said real and strong currency.

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unit of account, on 1 January 1999. The effective circulation of paper money with this denomination took place from 1 January 2002 onwards.

33 See Criqui and Soutif 1993. For the Brazilian edition, which took advantage and locally disseminated the seminar at the Pompidou Centre, in 1997, see Greenberg 1997.

34 For a diagnosis of the chronic weaknesses of the Brazilian artistic process, distinguished on the basis of the regulatory framework of strong form, see Naves 1996. For a specific review of the book, see Martins 1997b, p. 5.

The times of euphoria, of restoration of the art object and currency, also gave way to a picturesque programme to promote Brazilian artists, called 'Novos Talentos' [New Talents, 1995–8]. These artists were periodically invited to exhibit a painting on the wall of the president's office. In effect, the tradition of palaces in the image of the *casas-grandes* comes from the first projects of Brasília, if it is not already part of the Brazilian modernist imagination, originating from the proximity between artists and money owners at the time.<sup>35</sup> The novelty of the moment consisted of decorating the presidential office with a painting by a chosen young artist, selected by a committee of five critics,<sup>36</sup> thus turning the office into a kind of showcase or showroom, to divulge works and produce a stimulus for the market's dynamising of art.

The idea, characteristic of the courtesan and fetishistic imagination about the power scene, added to the kabbalistic exercise of prestige a dose of dependence and provincial mimetism. As a matter of fact, uses, artifices, and goods installed in the palace of Versailles (1682) were conceived by the so-called Sun King, Louis XIV and Colbert, his superintendent of finances, not only to fascinate the internal public, but also in the moulds of a showroom of the French luxury industry for the smaller or peripheral principalities and crowns, which regarded the French monarchy as the *nec plus ultra* of aristocratic refinement. Eventually, while the French luxury industry became a global success, in turn, in the recent Brazilian case, however, the presidential showroom did not yield the expected effects and the programme was ended.<sup>37</sup>

### Negotiation behind Closed Doors

The Real Plan reflected a monetarist analysis of the Brazilian economic crisis, founded on the interests of the high and middle owning classes. At an external level, it disregarded relations of dependence and, at an internal level, income inequality and class exploitation, to focus on the reordering of the economy based on monetary clearance. In effect, such a perspective was derived from the prevalence of financial capital in the consortium of political forces, on the

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35 See Chapter 2, in this volume.

36 The five critics nominated by the National Foundation of Arts (Fundação Nacional das Artes (FUNARTE)) were: Aracy Amaral, Fernando Cocchiarale, Frederico Moraes, Ronaldo Brito, and Sônia Salzstein. The programme selected a total of 16 artists. For details and comments, see the articles by Natali 1995; Carvalho 1995; and Strecker 1995.

37 See Carneiro 1999.

bases of the Real Plan, which dated from the negotiated transition, between the dictatorship and the opposition ten years earlier, in 1984 and 1985.

The political model of the Brazilian transition, in turn, reproduced in its political formulation the Spanish model of transition, of negotiation conceived within the regime in power, led by its formulators and concerted behind closed doors. In Spain, let us recall, the transition was triggered in December 1973, after the succession of Admiral Carrero Blanco at the head of Franco's regime,<sup>38</sup> and completed with the Moncloa Pacts in October 1977. In these pacts, the opposition parties and unions – in exchange for their legalisation and democratic formalisation – accepted fundamental institutes of the regime as a concerted constitution among notables, preserving the monarchy and preventing the questioning of Francoist crimes. Last but not least, they also accepted the application of economic austerity plans.

Following the same pattern, in Brazil the political consortium of the forces responsible for the transition to the so-called New Republic [Nova República] succeeded the generals' government – ensuring a frictionless succession and a high level of preservation of names, positions, and practices in all spheres of power.

From the point of view of local events, the consortium of classes and political forces that negotiated the Brazilian transition, according to the Spanish model, was formed from a strategy of alliances, whose go-ahead was crystallised in the 1974 elections, for the Brazilian Senate, in the moulds allowed by the military regime. The flood of votes in that election for the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) party<sup>39</sup> – which elected more than two thirds of the senatorial positions available at the time – made the chances for the negotiated transition and the alliance of classes that would support it seem mature.

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38 Carrero Blanco's parents and grandparents were military. An early Francoist, he had worked in the Military Staff of the coup plotters in the Civil War and authored a famous text, in 1940, recommending Spain's neutrality in the war, which in that context implied active collaboration with Nazism. He was killed in the position of head of government, in a (car-bomb) attack by ETA on 20 December 1973. On the Spanish transition, as a plot led by jurist Torcuato Fernandez de Miranda – former tutor of Prince Juan Carlos de Bourbon, and, as of December 1973, successor of Carrero Blanco at the head of the Francoist government; and on the complicity of Santiago Carrillo, then secretary-general of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), see the investigative report of Gregorio Morán to Antonio Yelo, in Moran 2013; see also the testimony of the former secretary-general of the PCE (1982–8) Gerardo Iglesias, member of PCE's central committee, during the Transition, to Alvaro Corazon Rural, in Iglesias 2013.

39 The MDB was the only opposition party permitted by the military regime.

On the side of the regime, the complementary signal had been given at the inauguration, in March 1974, of General Geisel's term (1974–9), when the general proposed a 'slow, gradual and guaranteed [lento, gradual e seguro]' process of political opening, to the tolerated bourgeois opposition.

### Tasks of the Negotiation: The Kiss of the Cross

The convergence process required for the negotiations was two-directional. In Spain, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) had, since 1973, fully joined the circle of Eurocommunist parties, which (without discussing the already dubious role played by the communist parties in 1968, in favour of the restoration of order),<sup>40</sup> since the military coup (11 September 1973) in Chile had been reiterating declarations of negation of class struggle, to favour, in contrast, large supraclassist national agreements in defence of bourgeois democratic legality and of the resumption of capitalist expansion.

Similarly, in the field of the tolerated Brazilian opposition, the sociologist and organic intellectual of the owning classes, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, acted as the intellectual spokesman of a negotiation programme. Thus, since 1973–4, Cardoso aligned insistent propositional formulas and declarations, seemingly featuring essays or scientific papers, recognising aspects of capitalist development, which the sociologist called 'associated dependency', which supposedly occurred during the regime. Cardoso pointed out in these terms that more flexibility in the regime or a negotiated transition was possible – without agreeing with the political programmes of the Marxist and Labourist opposition, most of which remained in exile.

This was the *sine qua non* condition and touchstone for both the dictatorship authorities and the participation of big business, alongside the empathy of the middle classes for the process: there would be no return to the class alliances and political forces that held sway prior to the 1964 coup, nor to the themes of the pre-1964 national political agenda, notably those directly linked to class struggle and anti-imperialism.

Thus, in an emblematic work, published twice, first in the journal *Estudos CEBRAP* 08 (São Paulo, April/June 1974), with the title 'As contradições do desenvolvimento associado [The contradictions of associated development]'<sup>41</sup>

40 See Singer 2013, pp. 186–205.

41 The work was originally presented at the international conference 'Sociology of Development and Development [sic]: Dependence and Power Structures [Sociologia del Desar-

– and the following year in a book – Cardoso took a step forward, sharply establishing all possible distances against the Marxist currents of the opposition. He presented, so to speak, his credentials as the formulator of the tolerated opposition. Thus, in the version for the book, *Autoritarismo e Democratização* [Authoritarianism and Democratisation, 1975]<sup>42</sup> – this time more vehemently and insistently seeking to present himself as trustworthy – the text was then renamed ‘As novas teses equivocadas [The new mistaken theses]’. In that text, Cardoso sought to disqualify the theses of the ‘Marxist theory of dependence’ and targeted the sociologist Ruy Mauro Marini in particular.

The latter, in exile in Mexico and Chile, had developed, in collaboration with other Brazilian social scientists in exile, Vânia Bambirra and Theotonio dos Santos, and the German economist André Gunder Frank, a school of critical thinking which launched the discussion of dependency issues, founded on the premises of revolutionary Marxism.

The Marxist theory of dependency renewed the investigation of the dialectic between centre and periphery, through a remarkably original and combative set of concepts and ideas that resonated in research centres of many continents. In fact, linked to the clandestine group *Política Operária* [Workers’ Politics (POLOP)], and in Chile to *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* [Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR)], this group of militant researchers elaborated in exile while working at the University of Chile and the National Autonomous University of Mexico [Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)], a theoretical production whose international impact involved not only the aforementioned Gunder Frank, who was conducting research in Latin America and had actively collaborated with the works on dependency theory, but also researchers and thinkers of political economy from other continents such as Samir Amin from Egypt, Immanuel Wallerstein from the United States, Giovanni Arrighi from Italy, etc.

Cardoso’s first task, so as to qualify as a theoretician of the tolerated opposition and to become an authoritative voice in the debate about the flexibilisation of the regime, was to oppose this sociological and economic school of major international academic influence, and to immediately block or discard the influence of their theses in the closed debate of the Brazilian transition.

In this sense, in the text in question, Cardoso avoided engaging in an effective discussion based on elements of the historical process – which would

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rollo y Desarrollo [sic]: Dependencia y Estructuras del Poder’, 4–11 November 1973], organised by the German Foundation to the International Development. See Cardoso 1974.

42 Cardoso 1975b.

require a cumulative work of reflection and criticism in the short term, unsustainable within the double role of sociologist and political articulator – against the interpretations of Brazil and Latin America elaborated by the theory of dependency. Instead, Cardoso opted for the quick and authoritarian academic path, disqualifying the concepts of the theory of dependency, characterising them as erroneous interpretations of Marx's texts, as if he were dealing with the work of students.<sup>43</sup>

Without entering into the merits of the ethics of such a tactic, it is important to note here that the menu of ideas was explicitly opposed to those of Marxist interpretation – all of which were discarded in a top-down gesture. In addition, the message between the lines came distilled by means of a very professorial bias. Thus, both signalled to the owners of power that the path designed by Cardoso for the controlled transition did not include the participation of Marxists – nor of the Labourist agenda of the Goulart government (1961–4), overthrown by the civil-military movement of 1964. In effect, the Marxist theory of dependency had its premises discarded *in limine* in the first pages of the text. So it happened also with the economic line of the Goulart government, which included theses on underdevelopment – albeit different from the Marxist ones – elaborated by economist Celso Furtado, then a professor at the Sorbonne in Paris, and with a great international reputation as economist and professor. Cardoso tried to bury these ideas through ostensive silence – suggesting disregard, irrelevance or anachronism.

In exchange, the path outlined in 'As novas teses equivocadas [The new mistaken theses]<sup>44</sup> by the theoretician of 'associated dependency' unfolded in empirical examinations and considerations, interspersed with bows to the business community – when it came to pointing out the capitalist modernisation and development in recent times in Brazil, under the dictatorship, and the active role of contemporary businessmen. In effect, more than a rigorous scientific discussion, it was a matter of sketching proposals and articulating political support for the controlled transition.

### Music to Dance to

Thus, the text's broader strategy, as well as outlining the negotiating path for the regime's authorities, aimed at building a substantive invitation to the par-

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43 See Cardoso 1975c, pp. 25–31.

44 See Cardoso 1975a, pp. 25–62.



ticipation of big entrepreneurs in the transition process. Affirmations were addressed to the latter, such as: 'capitalist development in the periphery is feasible';<sup>45</sup> dependent capitalism can advance in accumulation without necessarily insisting on under-remuneration of the workforce;<sup>46</sup> the local bourgeoisie, instead of consisting of 'lumpenbourgeoisies' – according to Gunder Frank's fulminant finding,<sup>47</sup> incorporated into the Marxist theory of dependency – existed as an 'active social force';<sup>48</sup> the political path of Latin America was not restricted to the 'crossroads – socialism or fascism',<sup>49</sup> etc.

In short, Cardoso's message was music to the ears of the regime, which was willing to negotiate, as well as to those of right-minded entrepreneurs. The latter were riding high after enjoying a surplus that was not merely huge but 'miraculous' – enabled by the ten years of ferocious repression of labour unions. Entrepreneurs who, in fact, at the time already saw in the crisis of the regime an obstacle to the internal and external expansion of businesses and who longed for a new cycle of modernisation.

In 'A questão da democracia [The issue of democracy]',<sup>50</sup> the text that closes, in 1975, the book-programme for the transition, Cardoso returned to these issues, pointing out what he called 'authoritarianism' as an obstacle to the development of capitalism, labelling it an 'anachronism'. The programme proposed in these terms was one of modernisation of the regime and, according to Cardoso, to be operated from within, by the entrepreneurs that supported the regime, but which now should take charge of the changes. Thus, from the point of view of the analysis, its terms and metaphors were promptly directed toward the ears of businessmen. The problem was posed in terms of the renewal and efficiency of management: the political model was said to be 'sclerosed', and the 'competent channels' were called 'clogged pipes'.<sup>51</sup> In short, it was a matter of unclogging the regime, or of executing an internal adjustment in the political model, unregulated and out of date in the face of the international order

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45 See Cardoso 1975a, pp. 27–8.

46 See Cardoso 1975a, pp. 31–3.

47 See Frank 1972.

48 See Cardoso 1975a, pp. 34–5.

49 See Cardoso 1975a, p. 38.

50 See Cardoso 1975b, pp. 223–40.

51 In the topic entitled 'Os riscos do imobilismo [The risks of immobility]': '[The] political life generated by the current bureaucratic-authoritarian order is "sclerosed". The "competent channels" are increasingly clogged. The basic problems of fluidity and communication ... between the state and the social sectors that support the power bloc remain unsolved' (Cardoso 1975b, p. 231).

(more than 40 years later, in 2017, we already know quite well how Cardoso, in his 'consulate', indeed unclogged and modernised the channels of contact between the state and big business, and left a legacy of complicity between both, fully used throughout the following 'consulates' of the so-called Workers' Party).

At the time, a similar modernising discourse had been made in Spain by the Democratic Junta, a broad front of organisations and personalities, articulated by the Communist Party (PCE).<sup>52</sup> Cardoso's proposals were quite similar. However, there were some differences between the two situations: In Madrid, there was a *generalissimo* (literally, a superlative general), and here, in Brazil, only a handful of plain bloody generals. In Madrid, the senility was not metaphorical as in Brasília, but in fact corresponded to the long agony of the *generalissimo*. In Spain, the monarchy was instituted, and with an authentic Bourbon educated by a Spanish tutor; here, in turn, only a 'consular regime' was instituted, later admitting re-election. In sum, the reproduction of the programme carried less weight. But such are the misadventures of dependency, especially accentuated when it comes to dependency at the 'associated' pace.

In summary, the path of negotiation outlined by Cardoso explicitly refuted the overthrow of the dictatorship on the streets and through the insurrectionary route of strikes and popular struggles. It was intended exclusively for the so-called central forces (without Marxist or Labourist opposition and without the hard ones of the regime), for top-down negotiations, in summit negotiations (according to the model already being rolled out in Spain), and, last but not least, with the active and essential participation of big businessmen and the upper middle classes.

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52 Document entitled 'Declaración de la Junta Democrática de España [Declaration of the Democratic Front of Spain]', officially presented on 29 July 1974, in Paris, by Santiago Carrillo (secretary-general of the PCE) and Rafael Calvo Serer (a philosopher linked to Opus Dei and so-called 'liberal monarchist' [sic]). The document proposed 'national reconciliation', and expressly called for the 'business sector, the protagonist of the new industrial society ..., to which the continuity of the regime would restrain its possibilities of development and modernisation'. The document continues: 'Spanish society wants everything to change in order to ensure, without any shocks or social upheavals ... the continuity of the state requires ... the non-continuity of the regime'. Later, the Junta was joined by the Party of Labour of Spain (PTE), the Carlist Party, headed by Carlos Hugo de Bourbon-Parma, the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), of Enrique Tierno Galván and Raúl Morodo, the Socialist Alliance of Andalusia, the Workers' Commissions (Comisiones Obreras (CCOO)), the association of jurists Justicia Democrática, and a series of notables such as the intellectual José Vidal Beneyto and the aristocrat and actor José Luis de Vilallonga.

The aforementioned result of November 1974 gave new impetus to the project. The channel for the gradual and controlled transition would be the so-called Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), which had seemingly gained voters' favour. Thus was set the elevated track for the formal construction of apparently democratic political institutions – and, moreover, shielded against subaltern interference. Their pillars consisted of a new social alliance: oligopolies and agribusiness, big businessmen and urban middle classes, born of the so-called 'Brazilian miracle'.

It was the 'open, sesame' for the flexibilisation of the regime and simultaneously for a new cycle of accumulation, shielded in numerous ways from those nostalgic for the old alliance, involving workers and unions, which had supported the second Vargas government (1951–4) and the Goulart government (1961–4). As is well known, both were governments headed by large landowners, but with an agenda of reforms deemed dangerous by the Brazilian owning classes.

### Surplus

What about the situation of the arts in Brazil? How did people react in the Brazilian art milieu to the agenda of negotiation, to the methods of transition behind closed doors, to the idea of corporate protagonism, etc? What did people make of this new cycle of 'concentrated effort' of the peripheral 'elites' or high classes, seeking to readjust the political and economic model? Was there a programme in the arts similar to the package of negotiated transition? What would such a programme be?

I did not detail Cardoso's strategy and arguments for nothing. For, in the history of the process of restoration of the art object in Brazil, there is a text, in *boca chiusa*, but effectively equivalent in strategic terms, to the essay in question by Cardoso, about what he called the 'erroneous theses' of the radical opposition. The text was entitled 'O boom, o pós-boom e o dis-boom [The boom, the post-boom and the dis-boom]',<sup>53</sup> signed by an art critic and three artists. It was published on 3 September 1976 in the weekly of the opposition, *Opinião* [Opinion], on whose editorial board Cardoso was a prominent and active member.<sup>54</sup>

53 The word 'boom' came in English in the original. 'Dis-boom' is a pun, invented for the text in question, whose sound evokes a Brazilian slang term whose meaning is somewhat near to 'coming out'.

54 See Brito, Caldas, Resende and Zilio 1976, pp. 25–8 (in the newspaper, the name of Resende

For the unsuspecting reader, the text only touched on the art market. There is no doubt that the article dealt with it, but it also dealt with much more, because, like Cardoso's text, it made broad propositions and had specific targets: some aiming at approximations, others demarcating dividing lines. However, let us first revisit the explicit themes, before we move on to what is not said, but only sung *bocca chiusa*.

Thus, the reasoning dealt from the outset with capital surpluses (also a crucial motive for Cardoso), propitiated by income concentration associated with economic expansion in the course of the so-called 'Brazilian miracle'. The text deemed money investments in the arts through auctions (very much in vogue at the time) as 'sterile' investments – because they aimed at existing works and did not generate new ones. In addition, according to the text, they were wasted investments, since they were basically aimed at the acquisition of works by modern Brazilian authors with no quotation in the international market, and worse, with prices inflated by auctions at the expense of the naivety of surplus owners. Something that further aggravated this scenario was the lack of a 'History of Brazilian art' to which one could turn for help, and which would effectively assess the value of each of the authors in question. To solve such dysfunctions, symptoms of an unstructured and informal art market, the text proposed a plan of action.

This plan was directed at a social and economic contingent – interested in modernising adjustments and the internationalisation of markets – comprising the axis of high and middle property-owning classes. According to the proposed plan, such classes were invited to intervene or to act politically and constructively aiming at the structuring of a contemporary art market. Such market was regarded as a national desideratum, coupled with the also desirable construction of a 'History of Brazilian Art', which would work as a device to prevent wrong steps and to rationalise the market. For such purposes, this functional institute would be built and periodical assessments of works and authors would be published, such as bulletins for the stock market, signed by renowned accountancy firms. In this transition to a new modernising adjustment made according to the image of the art market, built in the USA after WWII, the role attributed to the upper classes was one of potential patrons and subjects of a contemporary Brazilian market 'in progress'.

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was erroneously spelled as 'Rezende'); republished in Basbaum 2001, pp. 179–96. Brito, Caldas, Resende and Zilio worked together on the quarterly magazine *Malasartes* (which had three issues between September 1975 and mid-1976; the title was a pun, meaning approximately 'unfine arts'), and later on the journal *A Parte do Fogo* [The Work of Fire], which had only one issue (March 1980, Rio de Janeiro).

Which modes and forms should the intervention proposed by the potential buyers of contemporary art take? It should start with visits to artists' studios and with the establishment of new and direct ties between *production* and *circulation*. For investors, the programme would result in low prices with an upward trend – provided, of course, that they were well advised about the targets. For producers, direct contact would bring the shortening of the often lengthy period of time between poetic research and recognition of work, signalled by their entry in the sphere of *circulation*.

'The boom, the post-boom and the dis-boom' was undoubtedly part of the culture of opposition and, like Cardoso's text, aimed at a state of affairs, perhaps in the process of being created, but at that time still non-existent. Hence the critical tone of 'The boom ...' in the face of inconsistencies, its irony about the high quotation of authors with dubious talent, and its appeal to a commitment, mediated by a programme of action justified and presented not only according to the vocabulary of investors, but also by means of the current Marxist terminology.<sup>55</sup> Heterodox but customary flirtations in the culture of oppositions, between cultural groups that, despite everything, partake of certain salons.

### Delenda Est Carthago

Notwithstanding the eclecticism and ambiguities of vocabulary, the text, in an unspoken or *bocca chiusa* mode, had a specific target, beyond the contingent of potential art investors. Targets in *bocca chiusa* resided in certain circles of the art world, artists and critics, both those remnants of the generation before the hardening of the regime and the new generations, which at that point came into contact with the milieu (like myself, narrating this from memory). The imperative was to signal the outline of a new order in progress. Its cornerstone, 'acquisitive participation' –<sup>56</sup> if I could call it such in order to highlight the continuity and rupture with the model of participation, originally proposed by neo-Concrete art – now turned, as we shall see, into a class trophy.

55 On 'our aberration of a ruling-class Marxism', see P. Arantes 2007b, p. 215. (I am grateful to G. Motta for the reference).

56 The model of 'acquisitive participation' set a new pattern, in its own way and in a new key – whose necessary condition became owning monetary surpluses for investment – and thus concluded the epic discussion on the aesthetic participation of common people, triggered by neo-Concretism in the early 1960s, before the coup of 1964. For more on this discussion, see Chapters 4 and 9, in this volume.

In effect, just as Cardoso in his text had distinguished himself from the radical opposition (in that case, from authors who defended the Marxist theory of dependency and labourists, remnants of the Goulart government), it was a matter of signalling, through the message about the so-called 'boom' contained in the text, addressed to the art world, a divide that ran counter to the most relevant artistic trend up until 1969 – agglutinated around the positions of the dissolution of the object and of antiart, to sum up. Its artistic exponents (Oiticica, Clark, Dias, Cordeiro, etc.) and intellectuals (Mário Pedrosa) were then part of the diaspora caused by the hardening of the regime, or were experiencing forms of institutional ostracism, resisting in seclusion.<sup>57</sup> However, the influence of their works, examples, and strategies persisted. Thus, forms and modes of poetic activity, implying traces of the practices of dissolution of the object, even if discreetly, remained active (Conceptual art and new media art practices, happenings, etc.).<sup>58</sup>

From the perspective of the text about the 'boom', it was a question of framing or minimising the influence of such tendencies. By hindering 'acquisitive participation', they contradicted the development of the contemporary art market and the correlated implicit programme, which was one engaged in the restoration of the art object.

### Restoration of Art vs. Antiart

In short, it is well known that the process of overcoming form and then the art object towards antiart – which occurred in response to the coup of 1964 – happened in Brazil in favour of a process of accelerated politicisation. It took place in connection with the constitution of an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist conscience, sharp with regard to class conflict. As a consequence, a critical system of Brazilian culture was developed, with a multidisciplinary spectrum and constituted as a forum in permanent assembly. In order to outline a historical divide, we must now briefly contrast it to the later system under examination.

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57 On these topics and on the artistic production radicalised after the 1964 coup, see Chapter 4, in this volume.

58 See, for example, activities and programmes around new mediums (video, mail art, multimedia art, etc.) and new supports, which gravitated around the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of São Paulo, headed by Professor Walter Zanini, from 1963 to 1978.

It is a fact that essays such as 'The Aesthetics of Hunger' (1965),<sup>59</sup> by Glauber Rocha; 'General Scheme of the New Objectivity' (1967),<sup>60</sup> by Hélio Oiticica; the book *Subdesarrollo y Revolución* (1969),<sup>61</sup> by Ruy Mauro Marini; 'Dialectic of Malandroism' (1970),<sup>62</sup> by Antonio Candido; 'Culture and Politics in Brazil 1964–1969' (1970), by Roberto Schwarz,<sup>63</sup> etc., to mention just a few, constituted a broad critical-reflective process in an effective and original response to the 1964 coup. Oiticica's idea of antiart, as well as several other of his writings, belong to the fulcrum of this process.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast, the programme of the restoration of the art object,<sup>65</sup> of which the 1976 text on the 'boom' published by *Opinião* was a landmark, brought about an antithetical perspective. Based on the project of developing the art market, such a programme opposed the critical-reflective process, aforementioned in response to the coup of 1964, which had consolidated, on very original bases, the critical system of Brazilian culture, according to an alliance between the radicalised *intelligentsia*, the working classes, and popular sectors.

Three points, targeted as a priority, of the antiart programme and of the realist synthesis, elaborated between 1964 and 1969, had to be particularly eradicated by 1976, so that the new directrix of recognition and legitimisation of the market as an active social and symbolic force asserted itself. The points that corresponded, in the arts, to the 'erroneous theses', as Cardoso put it, to be annulled, were: 1) 'zero cost' and non-monetisable art, with a political, anthropological, and symbolic *agitprop* character, destined primarily for public spaces, and avowedly against the market; 2) the critical overcoming of the art object through the notion of antiart and correlated programmes, aimed at the construction of a new realism, basically articulated through propositions, installations, and manifestos, that is, focused on non-monetisable actions; 3)

59 See Rocha 1965, pp. 165–70, English translation available at: [http://www.tempoglauber.com.br/english/t\\_estetica.html](http://www.tempoglauber.com.br/english/t_estetica.html).

60 See Oiticica 1967; Oiticica 1997c, pp. 110–20 (with English translation); Oiticica 2011c, pp. 87–101 (English translation: pp. 227–33).

61 The book was published in exile, in Mexico, see Marini 1969.

62 See Candido 2004a, pp. 17–46, originally published as Candido 1970, pp. 67–89. English translation: Candido 2014a, pp. 79–103.

63 See Schwarz 1978, originally published as Schwarz 1970. English translation: Schwarz 1992, pp. 126–59.

64 See Chapter 4, in this volume.

65 For a systematic discussion of the set of historical inflections verified in the passage from the 'Brazilian visual system' to the 'system of authors', see Chapter 6, in this volume.

the priority alliance of classes, between the *intelligentsia* and the working classes, including the most marginalised sectors, such as slum dwellers and rural workers.

An emblem of this position was the fraternal association of Oiticica with residents of Morro da Mangueira [Mangueira Hill] and outcasts slaughtered by the police, as well as the protagonism given by the antiartist to the Afro component of Brazilian culture. All that had been systematically evidenced in Oiticica's texts from 1964 onwards that not only intended to re-found Brazilian culture, but also consisted of a declaration of war against colonised culture.<sup>66</sup>

In effect, just like Cardoso's text, the text about the 'boom' tried to sing in *bocca chiusa*, but in a decisive way, an ode about the non-return to the culture and to the agenda built between 1964 and 1969, in Brazil, and further developed in exile by banished authors. As regards class relations, as well as procedures relating to art, in the sphere of *production* and *circulation*, it was a matter of setting up a new social axis similar to that proposed by Cardoso: producers, in the case of artists and researchers, with the proprietary classes (potential collectors), which rode high on the surplus acquired in the years of the expansion of 'associated' capitalist development,<sup>67</sup> as Cardoso used to

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66 Thus, for example, in the text 'Tropicália' (4 March 1968), Oiticica affirmed: '[I] believe that *Tropicália*, [here he refers to the installation with the same title, dated 1967], which encompasses this entire series of propositions, came to contribute strongly to this objectification of a total "Brazilian" image, to the downfall of the universalist myth of Brazilian culture, entirely based in Europe and North America, and on an Arianism which is inadmissible here. In reality, with *Tropicália* I wanted to create the "myth of miscegenation" – we are Blacks, Indians, Whites, everything at the same time – our culture has nothing to do with the European culture, despite being, to this day, subjugated to it: only the Black and the Indian of our land did not capitulate to it. Whoever is not aware of this can leave. For the creation of a true Brazilian culture, characteristic and strong, expressive at least, this accursed European and American influence will have to be absorbed, anthropologically, by the Black and Indian of our land, who are, in reality, the only significant ones, since most products of Brazilian art are hybrids, intellectualized to the extreme, empty of any meaning of their own. And now what do we see? Bourgeois, sub-intellectuals, cretins of every kin, preaching "Tropicalism", *Tropicália* (it's become fashionable!) – in short, transforming into an object of consumption something which they cannot quite identify. It is completely clear! Those who made "stars and stripes" are now making their parrots, banana trees, etc.'. See Oiticica 1984, republished in Oiticica 1997e, p. 125 (with English translation). For more on this discussion, see Chapter 4 in this volume.

67 See Cardoso 1975c, pp. 12, 30–3.



say. The past, and especially the crisis and the episode of the overcoming of geometric abstraction,<sup>68</sup> in response to the coup, consequently became an object of repression and silence.

### Myth and System: Accelerated Modernisation

Fabrication of the past and the concerted operation of presenting the permanence of neo-Concrete art emerged as the last artistic paradigm of relevance in Brazil.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the text about the boom integrated and emblematically embodied a constellation of texts that revolved around certain axes: 1) negation – most often in *bocca chiusa* – of the recent history of Brazilian art post-1964; 2) the programme of construction of the Brazilian contemporary art market; 3) the progressive elaboration of a ‘History of Brazilian Art’, as the text about the ‘boom’ referred to, through texts introducing exhibitions (usually solo), articulated around ‘*connaissanceurship*’ exercises, as well as the application of the formalist conceptual device and of philosophy extracts pedantically distributed to fill in and mask the emptying out of historical relations.

In sum, such a discursive complex aimed at the development of a ‘system of authors’, with two primary purposes: replacing the politicised, anti-imperialist and decolonised realism of the ‘Brazilian visual system’;<sup>70</sup> and simultaneously guiding the market with a set of established and crystallised criteria, according to the *system of authors*, to which we shall return.

Due to its pioneering and already overtly programmatic nature, the text about the ‘boom’ can also be understood as a kind of initial act of constitution of the Brazilian section – ‘dependent-associated’, *comme il faut* – of the International Benefit Society of Friends of Form. The project of reconstruction of the art object in Brazil cannot, however, be understood without reference to an artist from previous generations, Sérgio Camargo.

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68 See Chapter 4, in this volume.

69 Ibid.

70 See Chapters 4, 5 and 6, in this volume.

### The 18th Brumaire of the (So-Called) 'Brazilian Constructive Project'

Leaving Paris, Camargo landed in Rio de Janeiro, where he settled in 1974. Coincidence or not, the occasion was propitious, since the aforementioned turning point was already arising in Brazil, in politics as much as in the art circles.

Two threads, mentioned previously, that were to be delineated between 1976 and 1977 – 'acquisitive participation' and the emergence of the revivalist mythology about the so-called 'Brazilian constructive project in art' – would count on the decisive participation of Camargo in its weaving.

Later, such threads would be interwoven, as genetic components, and integrate the formative nucleus of the *system of authors*, as a new regime of organisation and reproduction of the visual arts in Brazil. The protagonism attributed to businessmen and to the upper classes over the course of the political transition was indissociable from the constitution of a *system of authors*. This system was nourished by the constitution of the Brazilian contemporary art market. The text about the 'boom' was correlated to this transitional process, at both levels, and sought, as mentioned earlier, to establish in 1976 as starters of new collections, visits by collectors to artists' studios, done as acts of 'acquisitive participation'.

In parallel with such a process, the reinvented dubious narrative of the symbolic complex once constituted by Concrete/neo-Concrete art – however, now purged of the historical and critical trajectory of its main artists (Oiticica, Clark, Cordeiro, etc.) and critical unfoldings (New Figuration and New Brazilian Objectivity) – stood out and was projected as a historical nexus of the *system of authors*, in the form of the so-called 'Brazilian constructive project'. In this reinterpretation of Brazilian visual history – purged of the realist synthesis constituted in response to the 1964 coup – the ideological axis of the *system of authors* was fabricated. The denomination 'Brazilian constructive project in art' was shaped in the title of two retrospective exhibits at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo and at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM-RJ), in Rio de Janeiro, in 1977, and the corresponding catalogue.<sup>71</sup> This denomination, denoting a certain air of cloning, would not have developed without the amniotic fluid of the geometric paradigm's revivalism. A decisive factor in this revivalism, or even its cornerstone, was the work and activity of Camargo.

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71 See Amaral 1977. For more details on the emergence of the denomination see Chapter 3, in this volume.

But just who was Camargo? An artist with an erratic career and an average and toned-down production or, let us say, 'demure' [recatada] – the word now in vogue in the Temer administration (2016/17) to refer to the so-called 'virtuous women, restricted to housekeeping', praised by the current president of the Republic. As a matter of fact, Camargo did not effectively participate either in the field of geometric abstraction that predominated in Brazil between 1951/2 and 1964 or in its intense polemics.<sup>72</sup> In fact, during that period, Camargo – seven years Oiticica's senior – had lived for a long time abroad, in Argentina and later in France, supported by his family income. Working abroad and individually or as a freelancer, thinker of the art trading circuit, and intermittent poet, Camargo belatedly emerged between 1963 and 1964.<sup>73</sup> His proposal was a revivalist one, when the most relevant names of geometric abstraction in Brazil had already proceeded to overcome such a paradigm and moved towards the New Figuration.

White and geometric reliefs based on cylinders cut at different angles and arranged on a flat surface to create different optical variations; that was basically Camargo's programme in order to restore, according to a revivalist project, the geometric visual discourse, after the crisis of abstraction triggered by the coup of 1964.

The widespread use of white paint in such wood reliefs attenuated the marks of fitting, cutting, and facture in general, and produced a surface rich in optical effects that invited the eye to contemplate the Neo-Impressionist flux of luminous values. Further on, Camargo moved on from *wood* to *marble* – a material, in fact, with something of an asset-like character, a solid and durable patrimony to the liking of investors.

Curator and critic Paulo Herkenhoff, observing Camargo's process of geometrical revivalism, sharply summarised: 'it was a late leap backwards, in an environment that had taken the concept of Neoconcrete object to the extreme of the "non-object", theorised by Ferreira Gullar'.<sup>74</sup>

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72 For more on such dynamics and its historical process, see Chapter 3, in this volume.

73 For an against-the-grain reinterpretation of Camargo's biographical narrative, in the chapters of Camargo's trajectory in Buenos Aires and Paris, see Herkenhoff 2002, pp. 180–7.

74 See Herkenhoff 2002, p. 185.

## Second Empire of Geometric Abstraction in Brazil

In the process of restoration of the art object, in many ways Camargo's artistic proposals can be seen as the exact antithesis of the antiart road opened up by Hélio Oiticica. The antithesis did not elude Lygia Clark, who fulminated against the authorial aura of Camargo in a letter to Oiticica, dated 22 October 1970, written in Paris (where Camargo resided):

The mediocrity is almost total and sometimes I feel I'm speaking in a desert and that I haven't got the slightest communication with artists like Camargo. It seems we are from another planet, so great is the mismatch in everything regarding art and evidently also life.<sup>75</sup>

While, from 1964 onwards, Oiticica had conceived his parangolés (based on the everyday culture of popular resistance), incorporated the Escola de Samba Mangueira (a black community's music and dance association, sited at the Morro [hill] of Mangueira) into his work, and invited its samba dancers and percussorists to the opening of the exhibition *Opinion 65* (*Opinião 65*, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 12 August–12 September 1965), on a black-tie night, and perhaps long dresses (I could not ascertain), at the MAM-RJ,<sup>76</sup> Camargo, by contrast, as a wise boy much less given to outbursts than Oiticica, had gone in the opposite direction, along palatial paths. Thus, as a mature and reliable 'court artist', from 1965 to 1967 Camargo created an immense panel, officially called 'structural wall' (sic), measuring 4.60 × 30 m, for the Itamaraty Palace, the headquarters of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Ministério de Relações Exteriores], then under military rule. In spite of this, Camargo retained in his work something rooted in popular imagination: the constant celebratory reference, in wood and marble, to the *Euterpe* species, native to the tropics, very present and appreciated in Brazilian open-air markets of fresh produce.

Herkenhoff synthesised the historical meaning and circumstances of the emergence of the revivalist master of marble in Brazil over the course of the transition, which followed the musical score composed in Francoist Spain, at the time when Camargo returned in 1974 to the country:

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75 See Lygia Clark, 'Cité des Arts. 18, rue de L'Hotel de Ville, Paris, 4ème, 22 October 1970', in Clark and Oiticica 1996, p. 177.

76 See Chapter 4, in this volume.

In Brazil, Camargo's late affiliation takes place in the vacuum left by the crisis of geometric abstraction in the early 1960s. Camargo proposed a new formalism, valued as the ultimate consequence of the modern. This is the 'return to the order' of geometric abstraction, occupying the vacuum left by 1950s experimentation.<sup>77</sup>

### The Return of the Grand Master of the Order of the Easels

The sedimentation of the process of restoration of the art object and the constitution of a system of authors also brought about the resurgence and revaluation of another revivalist master, the painter Iberê Camargo.

For a long time, Camargo was the protagonist of a programme of 'return to order' which in his specific case implied, in addition to canvasses and palettes, a vulgate of expressionism and metaphysics. (It is possible that such a combination was cultivated in the pages and cultural soirées of a certain Brazilian literature rooted in Christianity and theology). Master Iberê Camargo, like a paintbrush templar, and the sculptor with the same surname, had been eclipsed by the experiences and dynamics of artistic debates since the emergence of geometric abstraction in 1951–2.

After the 1964 coup, faced with the critical and political radicalisation of experimental artistic research, in the course of the New Figuration, the New Brazilian Objectivity and subsequent experiments in realism (in works like *Newspaper* [*Jornal*, 1964] and *Against the Physiological Naturalism Op* [*Contra o Naturalismo Fisiológico Op*, 1965], by Cordeiro; *Tropicália* [1967], by Oiticica; *Freedom Territory* [*Território Livre*, 1968], by Dias, etc.), Camargo (the painter) remained, with his canvasses and brushes, outside the main scene, in the backstage of debates in Brazil.

In the early 1980s, the simultaneous conjunction of the international revivalist trend of the return to painting,<sup>78</sup> and of the sedimentation of the *system of authors*, in Brazil,<sup>79</sup> resulted in Iberê Camargo's move to the forefront of the Brazilian artistic scene. Iberê was then given the position of grand master of the new Brazilian order of the easels, that of the generation of brave Jedi knights who, paintbrush in hand, echoed and doubled, on a 'dependent-associated' scale, the neo-expressionist international trend.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> See Herkenhoff 2002, p. 186.

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter 9, in this volume.

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 6, in this volume.

<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 9, in this volume.

### In the Enchanted Kingdom of Strong Currency

The return to the order of the art object, under the patriarchal aegis of the two grand revivalist masters, the virtuoso of marble and the virtuoso of canvas, was supported by what the aforementioned text-programme about the 'boom' called, in 1976, 'strategic intelligence', aimed at the 'insertion of works in the circuit'.<sup>81</sup> Phallic aspects aside, the programme proposed that organic intellectuals, artists and *connoisseurs*, interested in the cause of the re-establishment of the art object, should also deal with the chores of the management of *circulation*.

Private galleries and museums, practically annexed by societies of friends – gathered around groups of collectors – have become the priority targets of the 'strategic intelligence' in question. With Cardoso's investiture in 1995 as First Consul of the so-called New Republic and the triumphant entrance, as the escort of the new Consul, of the young team of monetarist centurions into the programme of the 'dependent associated' state, new perspectives for the private management of official entities and public services opened up.

### The Era of Friends, Authors, and Monetarist Centurions

The 'societies of friends' then became hegemonic in museums. The creation of the Iberê Camargo foundation dates precisely from that same moment, 1995. This mega-institute is private. Now, two decades after its creation thanks to tax exemptions, it is already in a phantom-like state due to the financial difficulties of its founding patron and main sponsor. In short, it is in a situation similar to the white elephants, the arenas built for the Olympics and the football World Cup, by the following consulates (those of Lula and Dilma). This foundation, bearing the name of the grand master of the easels – a logical expression of the culture of the *system of authors* – was articulated by the painter before his death. It was sponsored by the Gerdau steel and fiscal matters investment group – one of the largest Brazilian corporations, with multinational plans and many relations in the spheres of government, warmly renewed consulate after consulate.

In sum, the dissolution of the Brazilian visual system and its replacement by a *system of authors*, organically linked to collectors, was not the work of a few or even of a single generation. In effect, the formation of the Brazilian

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81 See Brito, Caldas, Resende and Zilio, 1976, pp. 27–8.

visual system had its bases constituted in 1951–2, with the formation of the paradigm of geometric abstraction.<sup>82</sup> It reached its apex in the transition to realism, expressions of which included the New Brazilian Objectivity and the environmental programme,<sup>83</sup> together with the critical system of Brazilian or decolonised peripheral culture. Both of these critical-reflexive constructions were based on the alliance between the *intelligentsia*, the working classes and popular sectors.

Both systems, interconnected sides of the same critical process of decolonisation and Third-World aesthetic invention, had their destruction initiated by the Institutional Act Number Five ('AI-5', 13 December 1968), promulgated by the civil-military dictatorship.

What remained, basically in exile in the following years, not only in the arts, but also in Third-World experimental cinema, was vivid and tragic. It constituted a culture of resistance, made possible by the absence of censorship and repression in exile. However, the distance established by violence, separating artists from the workers and popular sectors – that is, from the historical and vital sources of the newly constituted realism synthesised from the crisis of geometric abstraction – brought about the agony of the visual and critical systems, fed by anti-capitalist struggles.

In the Brazil of the 'economic miracle' and income concentration, of the votes of the opposition for a fake political party, MDB, whose function was deceiving and conciliating, a new alliance of classes and a new cultural programme organically linked to the proprietary classes was forged. The current national situation is still ruled by the empire of dependency and by the baronage of the financial system, before which the arts were feudalised in cultural institutes, set up at the expense of surplus allowances and tax exemptions.

Is it perhaps surprising that Brazilian contemporary art, apart from very rare exceptions (which, furthermore, appear largely incomprehensible in respect of their critical resistance to the restoration of the fetish of the art object and the hegemony of the market) is today limited to gravitating around collections, and thus has little or barely nothing to say?

In effect, it is not only the country that succumbs to the dismantling. The 'enemy has never ceased to be victorious',<sup>84</sup> as Benjamin said, and even tombs

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82 See Chapter 3, in this volume.

83 See Chapter 4, in this volume.

84 Benjamin 2005, p. 42.

and memories have been occupied. Where there once were anti-capitalist art and struggles, fetishes are now enthroned. 'Who will set us free' – today or tomorrow 'from the Greeks and Romans?'

According to the arts – which taught us how to fight – we can today affirm: In the 'Raft of the Medusa' that Brazil has become, from consulate to consulate, still under the fetters of the despotic mode inaugurated in 1964, really, only 'the black smile, a black embrace' would do, as Dona Ivone Lara used to sing:<sup>85</sup>

*Black is the root of freedom  
Black is the root of freedom  
Black smile, a black embrace  
Brings happiness  
A black person without a job feels restless  
And black is the root of freedom*

*A black smile, a black smile, a  
Black embrace  
Brings happiness  
Black with no job feels restless  
Black is the root of freedom*

*Black is a colour of respect  
Black is inspiration  
Black is silence, mourning  
Black is loneliness*

*Black who was once a slave  
Black is the voice of truth  
Black is fate is love  
Black is also longing*

*A black smile,  
A black embrace,  
A black, black, black smile  
A black embrace  
Brings happiness*

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85 The song in question, by Dona Ivone Lara, is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVtoundTTiE>.



*Black with no job feels restless  
Black is the root of freedom*

*A black smile,  
A black smile, a black embrace  
A black embrace  
Brings happiness  
Black with no job feels restless*

*Black is a colour of respect  
Black is inspiration  
Black is silence, is mourning  
Black is loneliness*

*Black who was once a slave  
Black is the voice of truth  
Black is fate is love  
Black is also longing*

*A black smile, a black embrace  
A black embrace,  
Brings happiness  
Black with no job feels restless*

*Black is the root of freedom  
Black is the root of freedom  
Black is the root of freedom  
Black is the root of freedom.*



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